

Songs of the Forest

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The Folk Poetry of the Gonds

by

Shamrao Hivale and

Verrier Elwin

With a Foreword by

Sir Francis Younghusband

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FOREWORD

I KNOW nothing of the particular forest people of whom Verrier Elwin and Shamrao Hivale write, though I have met somewhat similar peoples in Central India. But I do know Verrier Elwin himself, and he has kindly kept me in touch with his work ever since he commenced it. I have been able to see the gay courage with which he faces his many difficulties and disappointments and I have especially noted the true joy he has in his work. He really does enjoy living with these very primitive Baigas and the hardly less primitive Gonds—living right among them and in their own way in their own forests. And being a man of extreme sensitivity he can enter into their souls and divine what is in them.

He can do that. But can he convey to us in England what he has seen? Not all, that would be beyond any man's capacity. We would have to see the men themselves—and the women too, we would have to see them in their strongly contrasting and quickly changing moods; and we would have to see them in the excitement of the chase or the dance when they have wholly let themselves go—we would have to hear their music and their song really to understand them. Yet by reading these songs and legends we do get a glimpse into their souls. We can imagine how they would give unrestrained vent to their natural disposition. And we can see how close they are in touch with Nature, with the forest, and the birds and the animals and how they love this life.

But this primitive forest life may soon pass away. Civilization may overtake these secluded people. Or even if that may be for some time deferred it may not occur again that one who is himself a poet may be living among them to translate their songs. It is well therefore that those songs are now on record, and that we are enabled to see that wild as may be their lives, they have plenty of capacity for enjoyment.

FRANCIS YOUNGHUSBAND

PREFACE

THE songs translated here are a selection from some fifteen hundred collected by the members of the Gond Seva Mandal, a small society working for the forest tribes of the Central Provinces of India. Considerable difficulty attended their collection—for the tribesmen of the forest do not yield their secrets readily—and still greater difficulty their translation. Sung in Gondi and the obscurer Hindi dialects, many of the songs are worthless as poetry or even as sense, and not a few are unintelligible even to the singers themselves, yet every now and then there are gleams like the flashing of a shield that more than reward the translators for their labour. While I am responsible for the final form in which the songs are printed, the translation was the work of a "syndicate"—a Gond magician, a Pardhān dancer, the village blacksmith, ourselves, and from time to time the local cowherd or the Baiga priest co-opted as advisory members. The versions faithfully convey the meaning, though not the form, of the originals, except that we have omitted for the most part the strange cries and ejaculations that punctuate the verses, for

*That no style for pastoral should go
Current, but what is stamped with Ah! and O!
Who judgeth so, may singularly err*

Nor have we burdened our pages with a repetition of the stock refrains that are attached to every song, but which often have no connection with its theme.

We have not attempted to reproduce the form of the songs, for this is usually dependent on the changing rhythm of the dance, the metre being ruthlessly stretched to meet its needs, and extra syllables or meaningless phrases interpolated where necessary. The actual rhythm of the words would be monotonous beyond bearing—like the metre of *Hiawatha* with a hint of *Locksley Hall*—without the colour, the

excitement, the music of the dance, "the nimble horn-pipe and the timbурine"

This book may be taken as being in some sense representative of the primitive culture of the Satpūra Hills Betūl, Chhindwāra, Seoni, Bālāghāt, Bilāspur, Mandla and the Rewa State have been laid under contribution. Three of the four ancient Gond kingdoms are thus represented, and in these districts live well over a million tribesmen. Most of the songs are from the Gonds and the Gond sub-castes, but a few Bugṛ songs have been included. There is room for a second volume representing the culture of the southern districts, while the dance and song of the Māria Gonds of Bastar is distinctive and should be treated separately.

The Introduction does not attempt to do more than provide a background for the better understanding of the songs. It is not a treatise on Gond history and customs. These are treated very fully in Russell's great work, *The Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces of India*. Those interested in the subject should also refer to Trench's delightful *Grammar of Gondi*, the second part of which gives some of the legends current in the Betūl District, to the Census Reports for the Central Provinces, and to the District Gazetteers published by the Government of India. We have tried, as far as possible, to avoid repeating information that has already been recorded by these authorities, and the legends, stories and songs that appear in this little book do so for the first time.

We have had many helpers. Sunderlal Paukṛ toured widely on our behalf and secured some of the most interesting of the songs. S. L. Srikanth accompanied me on a long expedition among the Baigas, and took down some remarkable Baiga poems and stories. To M. Patil we owe one beautiful translation. Sundar Wairagakar, Ghasi Raj Gond, Munda Agarīa, Indralal Pandit, Kartik Gond, Sunderlal Mehra, Panda Baba, Phulabai Pardhānin, Ahalyabai Pankin and others also helped in the collection and elucidation of the songs.

At present the Indian villager is very much in the public

eye. His economic condition is a favourite theme of politicians, his social customs are eagerly recorded by anthropologists. But very few of those who talk so readily about the dumb masses or the toiling millions seem to think of them as real people, real as themselves. The villager is an object of interest, even of pity, but he is in another order of mankind. The forest-tribe-man—and he numbers eighteen million—is perhaps more distant than any other from the educated population of India. These poems are a window into his mind and heart. They will show that he too, with his strange knowledge and weird customs, his utter poverty and ignorance, is interested in the same essential things as the rest of the world. He is not content “to wander, with a sorrowful heigh-ho, among the owlets and hobgoblins of the forest.” Romance and adventure are his meat and drink. Beneath the apparently bovine monotony of his life there is a rich vein of pleasure and excitement, and this excitement, expressed in music and song, is his culture. I believe that after reading the pastoral tragi-comedy of his poetry carefully no one could again think of the forest people as mere cyphers in the population of India. The Gond may say in the words of Ben Jonson’s *Lorel the Rude*—

*Why scorn you me?
Because I am a herdsman and feed swine?
I am a lord of other geer*

VERRIER ELWIN

GOND SEVA MANDAL, KARANJIA
MANDLA DISTRICT, INDIA

January 1935

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INTRODUCTION

I

His country lies beyond and beyond, forest and river, forest, swamp and river, the mountains of Arakkaboo—leagues and leagues

The Gonds, with their Dravidian tongue and nickname of 'Children of Rāwan,' Demon king of Ceylon, seem to have invaded central India from the south, travelling up through the wild ranges of Bastar and along the banks of the Godāvari. How or where they lived, however, we have no certain knowledge until, in the fourteenth century, we find them established as kings in Betūl, Chhindwāra, Mandla and Chānda, and then for two or three centuries the highlands of central India, which are still known locally as the Gondwāna, were ruled by them. Their government seems to have been tolerant and kindly: the country prospered. Forts, tanks and wells were built. The palaces were filled with wealth. Akbar's army found a hundred jars of gold coins and much jewellery and a thousand elephants in the fort of Chauragarh. The kings of Chānda built royal tombs, lakes, palaces, and surrounded their city for seven miles with a great wall. Herds and flocks increased and even the peasants, it is said, paid tribute in elephants and gold mohurs.

But the Gond kings had no organization, no ability for war, and before the invasion of the Maratha chieftains in the eighteenth century, their kingdoms collapsed almost without resistance, and they were driven deep into the recesses of the hills and forest. That was a swift end to kingship and honour. By the beginning of the nineteenth century the Gonds had split up into a number of wild and savage tribes, making a living by plundering caravans and raiding the smaller towns from their mountain strongholds. Under British rule they settled on the land and took to their present occupation of farming. But now a greater calamity befell them. More dangerous than the 'mountain rats of Maharash-

Kali Yug, the Age of Darkness When the railway came, all the gods took train and left the forest for the big cities, where by their help the people prosper—a pathetic comment on the march of civilization

So whenever possible the Gonds entrust their religious duties to a Baiga priest The Baigas are an even more primitive tribe who claim to have been created immediately after the beginning of the world They are full of magic. Naked, dirty, with long wild hair and bright eyes, they live so close to the soil that Mother Earth loves them and tells them her secrets. So the Baiga knows where the evil spirits live and how to avoid them. He can shut the mouth of the tiger and is able to make the proper sacrifices at the time of sowing and reaping

If a Baiga is not to be found, a Pardhān may give his services The Pardhans, once regarded as a criminal tribe, are a sub-caste of Gonds Long ago at the beginning of all things, there were seven Gond brothers who made a feast in honour of Burra Deo They spread sumptuous offerings before him, but he did not appear Nothing could tempt him Then they asked their youngest brother to make music for them, but he refused They loaded gifts upon him, gold and silver, jewellery and all manner of ornaments, and at last he consented With a gourd and a piece of wood and a strand of wire, he made the first *kingri*, or fiddle, and on it played so exquisitely that Burra Deo came down to bless the feast. But afterwards the Gonds looked down on their younger brother who had adopted the ignoble and immoral profession of music—it was quite another matter to be inspired amateurs like themselves—and refused to take food from his hands. The Pardhans are still good musicians they are more intelligent, more interesting, but less manly and independent than other Gonds

But all the Gonds have blood You may see some old tumbledown wreck of a man carry himself with a royal dignity A Gond girl walks through the forest like a queen, a tigress-queen the movement of her body is a perfect rhythm *There are boys with the carriage of princes They have blood*

II

Panda Bābā is a leading Gond wizard of the Mandla district, an elderly man of great style and character. He has a group of disciples whom he is instructing in the elements of magic. He has that slight stoop which suggests a store of esoteric wisdom, and a reserved and cautious look in his eye which makes you suspect that he knows more than he reveals. In his more inspired moments, he has the air of one who expects at any moment to ascend to heaven in a chariot of fire. Yet he is not wholly spirit, this old man, like Plotinus, has a sound business capacity. See him coaxing three annas' worth of oil out of a reluctant villager with just that blend of push and deference that a Bishop might employ to extract a financial grant from some Provincial Governor. He has perfect tact. When we were collecting songs and stories from the Baigas, we found that the shyest raconteur would unburden himself when that sage old head began to nod appreciatively by his side. Panda Bābā is a conservative, he does not approve of the new-fangled Hindu ideas that are invading the countryside. His stories are very old.

According to Panda Bābā, then, in the beginning all was water, and Bhagavān (the Eternal) sat on a lotus leaf in the midst of the ocean. His priest, Sahadev Pandit, sat by his side, in his hand a holy book large as a mountain. Bhagavān cleaned his body of the dirt that was on it, and out of that dirt he made a crow and bade it go search for the earth. The crow set out and for six months it searched, but found no place to rest nor anything to eat or drink, for all was ocean. But there was a huge tortoise, Chakramal Chatrī was its name—on the bottom of the sea was its foot, its head reached to the sky.

The crow settled on its head, and Chakramal Chatrī asked, "Who are you? For twelve years I have been hungry. I will make a meal of you." The crow answered, "Bhagavān has sent me forth to find the earth, but six months have passed

and I have not found it, and I too am hungry " Chakramal Chatri answered, "You rest here for a time, and I will look for the earth instead " So saying, he sank into the depths of the ocean, and there he discovered that the earth had been swallowed by Nal Rāja and Nal Rāni who were living in hell. So the tortoise went down, and caught hold of them by the neck. Having swallowed the earth, they were sitting with their faces to the sun. He squeezed their necks hard till they said, ' Very well, we will give you the earth " They gave him a tiny grain, which Chakramal Chatri took and returned again to the surface of the ocean. His two hands were sticking out of the water—on one sat the crow, in the other was the grain of earth. Thus he sent to Bhagavān with a letter, which he tied under the crow's wing. But when Bhagavān received it, he asked himself, "What am I to do with this?"

He made seven little pots out of the leaves of his lotus, and divided the grain into seven parts, putting one part in each pot. He left them there for eight days and then they began to grow. He made a churning rod by rolling together some weeds from the sea, and churned the seven pots for eight days more till the grains began to form. They did not grow properly, however, so he asked Sahadev Pandit, ' How am I to make this into a world?' Sahadev Pandit began to read in his book, and it took him eight days and nine nights to read the first page of it. The book said, ' Call Pawan Dassorie (the Wind)' So the Wind came and began to play with the grains, blowing them in the air and mixing them together. So at last the earth began to take shape. At first it was called Born of Water, then Daughter of Water, then the Solid Earth, then the Boy Earth, then the Red Earth, then the Black Earth, then the Milk Earth, then the Earth without Cracks, then the Earth with Hills, and at last the Earth Complete.

On this earth the gods were born. The first gods were Ala, Udal and Bharat. Then the trees of the forest were born. Then the Cow-mother was born. And at last Man was born. Then out of the earth was formed the grass and a forest grew up.

Now the gods showed the Cow-mother that grass was to be her food, while man's food remained in the hands of Brahma Annadeo,¹ the God of Food, lived with Brahma who said to him, "Go down to earth for the enjoyment of man" So Annadeo went down, and grew to be as tall as twelve men standing on each other's shoulders But Brahma said to him, "Men cannot reach you, for you are too tall" So he became as high as six men together But they said, "You are still too tall" So he became smaller still, to the height of three men, then to the height of one, then till he was only as high as a man's chest, until at last he could only reach to a man's loins Then, when he was so high, everyone was pleased

Now as the God of Food stood there, leaves sprouted from him, like the leaves of a wheat-field The gods caught hold of him and shook him, and grain fell on the earth So men began to sow the God of Food behind their houses They cut down the forest, and set fire to the trees, and sowed the god in the ashes² After the rains he grew abundantly Near the place of this sowing there was a little pond where Thākur Deo, husband of Mother Earth, the protector of mankind, had his abode He enjoyed the good crop from the body of the God of Food But after a time the Baigas saw him feeding, and they said to each other, "What is he eating? Let us search and see" They sought everywhere, but could find nothing, for Thākur Deo's tongue was ten feet long and he used to eat from a distance

There was a Baiga priest there who performed this magic. He said, "If this is the work of some god or spirit, then tomorrow morning let there be a dead stag in the field where he is feeding." So saying he clapped his hands and ran home At cock-crow next morning, he came to the

¹ Annadeo, though strangely masculine, must be the same as the Anna Purna of the South, and the Gauri of Hindu weddings, who is goddess of the golden grain and thus Demeter or Proserpine

² A reference to the Bewar or shifting cultivation which is still practised in certain specified areas such as the Baiga Chowk in Mandla

field and there was a stag—dead. He said, "What I have desired has happened. Now I shall walk once round the field. Let the body of the stag go rotten." He walked round the field, and when he returned he found worms moving in the body of the stag. "Twice have I seen the power of gods or spirits," he said. "Now if they show their power a third time, I will offer sacrifice. Let this dead and rotting stag rise to its feet and run into the jungle." Immediately, the stag got up and ran away into the jungle.

And now the Baiga saw Thākur Deo, that ancient god. "Make my crop grow well," he said, "and I will offer thee a goat and a pig." So the God of Food grew strong and fat in that Baiga's field. When he was ripe, twelve men had to be employed to cut him. They worked for eight nights and nine days and yet the work was not finished. Then they prepared the threshing-floor, and the bundles were brought in. The bullocks trod upon the ears for eight nights and nine days, and when the work was finished the goat and the pig were killed. A little was offered to the Earth, and the rest was cooked and eaten. Then when all was over, they started to carry the grain to the house. For eight nights and nine days they worked till the whole house was filled with the Food God. When all was finished, Thākur Deo brought the chaff back on to the Baiga's threshing floor and said, "I will not remove it till you sacrifice to me again." Then the Baiga promised that he would give his first-born child if he would remove it. Thākur Deo called Pawan Dassorie, the Spirit of the Wind, and he blew all the chaff away. Then that Baiga brought his son, and made him sit in the middle of the threshing floor, by the pillar, and Thākur Deo came in with his bow and arrow and shot the child. The boy died there in the place where he was sitting. When the villagers came home and saw the boy dead, they all began to weep. So they carried his body to the jungle, and burnt it on a pile of wood.

Annadeo, the God of Food, is still helped by Thākur Deo who can turn one grain into two, or four, or a thousand. But the poor God of Food is now very thin and falls to the

ground in fits, and the English have carried all the gods away from the forest in the railway

More closely related to the songs is Panda Bābū's tale of Lakshmanjati. In this the ancient Hindu epic is transformed, Rāma and Sita fade into the background, and the hero is the unmarried Lakshmanjati, a Gond in all but in name, with his *nummat-kingri*, the fiddle that sings the songs of love. But Lakshmanjati, like that other Gond hero, Rai Linga, is the incarnation of purity. And it is for that reason that he is revered even above the great Rāma himself.

Rāma and Lakshman lived in Jayatāpur, the city of the gods. Rāma had a wife, but Lakshman lived alone. So he had a palace built for him outside the village, and Rāma's beloved Sita took food there for him every day. Lakshmanjati had a *kingri*, a fiddle. It was a *nummat-kingri*, a fiddle that played the songs of love, and he played it day and night. But one day Rāma came and said, "Don't play your *kingri* so much," and he hung it up on the wall above the head of his bed. Then one midnight that poor forgotten *kingri* began to weep. The tears fell on Lakshmanjati's chest. He felt cold and sat up. "Where do these tears come from?" he asked himself, "there is no one here." As he sat wondering at this, he realized that it was his *kingri* that was weeping. So he took it down from the wall and began to play. Then for joy its voice went far and wide.

In Indra's realm, the fairy goddess Indrakāmini was threshing grain when the voice of the *kingri* entered her left ear, and there it settled. Then said Indrakāmini to her maidens, "Who is this *sādhu* that I hear? Go look for him and bring him to me. I have a gift for him." The maidens went out to search, but they could not find him. At midnight Indrakāmini could not sleep for thinking of the music-maker, so she got up, and, bringing out a pot of gold mohurs, began to search herself. Through all the realm of heaven she passed, and at last she put her foot on the earth.

There was a *sādhu* whose hair was so long that it covered

is a bear, the third is a panther, the fourth is a monkey, and the fifth is a cobra. All these are his servants who stop anyone from entering. But now go to the bazaar and buy two goats, and some parched rice and a vessel full of milk."

Indrakāmini went to the bazaar and bought these things. Then the old woman said, "Kill the goats." When this was done she said, "Throw some of this meat to the tiger, and while he is eating, he will forget about you. At that moment you may slip past him. Do the same for the bear and the panther. When you come to the monkey, give him some parched rice, and when you reach the cobra put the pot of milk before him. In that way you can pass them all, and meet Lakshmanjati at the end."

In this way Indrakāmini made her way into Lakshmanjati's house. She went from room to room, until at last by the door of one room she stopped and stood quietly watching. Lakshmanjati was there playing on the *kingri*. For a long time she watched him, and then she heard him say, "Whose shadow is that?" But he did not come out to look, he hung up the *kingri*, and went to sleep.

Indrakāmini went to him, she shook him and beat him, but she could not wake him up. So in a rage she took the bangles from her arms, and broke them and scattered the pieces over his bed. She also took the *dhār*¹ from her left ear, and said to it, "This curse be on thee, fit no one's ear save the ear of Sita." So saying, she placed the *dhār* by his side and fled away.

Early next morning, Sita came as usual to clean Lakshmanjati's room. From a distance she saw many bangles lying broken on the bed. She ran home and said to Rāma, "The purity of your brother has sunk low to-day." "How has his purity sunk? He is holiness itself. Come, show me." Thus said Rāma. As they entered the palace they asked each of the watchers, "Has any girl entered here to-day?" But they all said, "We know of no one who has entered." But when

¹ A large earring shaped like a shield

Rāma saw the broken bangles and the *dhār* lying on the bed, he was filled with sorrow. He tried to wake his brother, but he slept on. So he took the *dhār*, and ordered the *mukkadāma* and the *koṭuār*¹ to bring all the girls of the village to him. When they had come, he made them stand in a line and said, 'Here is a *dhār*. The girl whose ear it fits will be the wife of my brother.'

So all these girls said in their minds, "If only it would fit me." Those whose ear holes were small put their fingers in them to make them bigger. Those whose ear-holes were large tried by pressing hard to make them smaller. But when the *dhār* was brought it did not fit any of them. Then said Rāma, "Are these all the women of the village? Are there no others?" The *mukkadāma* and the *koṭuār* answered, "In the list of women only one name remains, and that is the name of your beloved Sita." He said, "Call her here." They brought her, and when the *dhār* was put in her ear, it fitted as though it had been made for her. Then Rāma said in his mind, 'This pure brother of mine has become my enemy.' He ordered twelve *agarīa* (blacksmiths) to make a huge iron grain-bin and they brought much coal from the jungle and it was piled over that bin till it looked like a mountain. By the time it was ready, Lakshmanjati had awakened. He was brought there, and Rāma said, "You are not my brother, you are my enemy. Come and prove your purity."

In that village a Brāhmin girl had given birth to a child that very day. Lakshmanjati took the child and his *nmmat-kingri* into the great bin, and the door was shut upon him. The twelve blacksmiths started the fire. The fire burnt for eight nights and nine days. As the days went by and the fire grew fiercer, Lakshmanjati played more gaily on the *kingri*. The child grew also very quickly, as much as one sesamum seed every minute. Where the child and he were sitting the green grass grew beneath them. Then after the eight nights and nine days were passed, the door was opened,

¹ Minor village officials.

and Rāma said, "If you are pure then only will you be alive. Come out, my brother."

To the surprise of everyone, Lakshmanjati came out unharmed, with the little boy and his *kingri*. The child, who was only nine days old, looked as if he were seven months. But even then, Rāma's heart was hardened. Said he, "I do not even now trust you, my enemy."

So he called the Baigas and asked them to cut down the forest. When the trees were cut, Lakshmanjati was put in the middle of them. Then the Baigas set fire to the trees. But Lakshmanjati went on playing on his *kingri*. Rāma sat in his palace thinking, "Now surely this brother of mine will be destroyed." But at that very moment the fire died down, and Lakshmanjati came out of the ashes, shaking off the dust from his hands and feet. Where he had been sitting in the fire, there tender grass had grown. But Lakshmanjati now said to his brother, "Never will I stay with you again," and he ran away from that place. The earth opened before him and after he had gone down, she closed herself above him.

As he was going down into the earth, Lakshmanjati met an old cobra. He said in his mind, "I will stay with this cobra and work for him." So he served the cobra for twelve years, and then the cobra gave him his daughter for wife. There in the under-world a green canopy was made of fresh bamboo, and they were married. After the marriage, the cobra gave a closed golden basket to his son-in-law and said, "Now go back to the world, but do not open this box on the way. If you open it before you reach your home, you will never get my daughter."

So Lakshmanjati climbed up into the world again, but as he went he desired greatly to open that box. First he half opened the lid, but shut it again and walked on. Then again he said, "I must open it and see what is there." He sat by the roadside, and opened the basket. As he did so, the girl flew out of it and vanished to the four corners of the earth. Lakshmanjati hunted for her everywhere, but she had become the lightning, and never was he quick enough to

catch her. Still to-day you may see the cobra's daughter flash across the sky, and hear the roar of Lakshmanjati's arrow that pursues her.

The noble legend of Rai Linga, hero and king of the forest, whose story has been told by Mr C C Trench in the most romantic book of grammar to be published from an official press, bears a family resemblance to this tale. Rai Linga is likewise the very perfect gentle knight, an incarnation, born of a human queen miraculously, bursting from the crown of her head. But the queen decides that a curse has been born to her, and she asks two of her serving maids to take the child away and bury him alive. But when they look at him, he smiles at them, and they hide him under a banyan tree instead. The Queen of the Vultures rises from her mountain and goes out in search of food. She carries Rai Linga high above the hills, but finding he is alive, she dares not eat him, and drops him instead into the lap of Queen Barren, the lonely consort of King Sterile. There is great joy in that sad court, but as the boy grows he wanders with bow and arrow in the forest, until at last he comes to his birthplace and his mother. She makes him king, setting him over his six elder brothers who try to kill him. Failing in this, they set out on a long trading expedition, leaving Rai Linga to look after their wives. By them his purity is assailed night after night, but he never yields, and in despair they take him to the jungle to shoot green pigeon, and strip him naked there, yet he speaks no word. At last the women shut themselves up with an angry cat, and allow themselves to be scratched and bitten until they develop fever. When their husbands return, they say that Rai Linga has dishonoured them, and the brothers burn the boy to death in an iron grain bin. But three days later, when they go to perform the funeral rites, they find him alive, for over the sinless death has no power. Then they realize the guilt of the women, and raise Rai Linga to great honour, and, in spite of his protests, they tie bars to their wives' legs and, yoking bullocks to them, drive them round and round the village.

till they die Then Rai Linga sets out in search of fire He finds fire in the forest, and new queens for his brothers But he himself refuses to marry "Do your royal and worldly business," he says, "I may not stay" He embraces them all and vanishes, returning to his own heavenly abode.

We will give two more examples of the tales told by the fireside in these little villages among the Satpūra Hills They were given us by Hothu the Baiga in a remote village of Bilāspur It was a strange and absorbing sight to watch in the firelight the wild handsome faces of the Baigas as they listened to Hothu, himself a tall, striking-looking man, naked save for a scanty loin-cloth, his long hair tied in a knot hanging on one side of his head, in his ears large rings of white and blue beads Certainly he had the gift of speech He told his stories with slow expressive gestures, long pauses, a touch of poetry in his repetitions, and an inimitable trick of crumpling up his forehead at the funny bits His first story was in form exactly parallel to the Salla songs, a theme progressing gradually through various grades of innocence to a highly vulgar termination

An ant and a piece of charcoal set out on a journey together They came to a river and stopped to consider who should cross first. At last the charcoal crossed first and the ant followed The ant said, "So a coal-black ant and a piece of coal have become friends!" After they had crossed the river, the water became black. Presently a stag came to drink and asked the water, "How did you become black, O water? Till now you were quite clear" "Hear me, O stag," replied the water "An ant and piece of coal have turned me black, and now I shall turn you lame." The stag drank the water, and then went limping up the hill to find some *mahuā* fruit When it came to the tree, the *mahuā* asked, "What is the matter? An hour ago you were going to eat so much and now you are taking nothing" The stag replied, "You only belong to the plant caste, while I belong to the animal caste, so what can you understand? But, a

I have become lame, so do you grow small " And the *mahuā* which had been very large, became small The stag limped away home

Then a bird settled on the tree and began to eat "What is the matter?" it said "Yesterday I was satisfied with one of your fruits, but to-day after four or five I am still hungry " And the *mahuā* said, "Hark to the tale of the coal-black water, the limping stag and the tiny tree." When it heard it, the bird began to say, *Chee-pee, chee-pee* It flew away and found a *bar-tree* for food But it could eat nothing All the time it flew to and fro saying *Chee-pee, Chee-pee* The tree said, "What is the matter? Till now you used to come silently for food But now you eat nothing and talk all the time " The bird said, "Hark to the tale of the coal-black water, the limping stag and the tiny tree, the poor little bird that missed its dinner, and bitter berries shall grow on thee "

Early in the morning the women of the village went to fetch water, and one of them was the sort of girl that is always eating this or that. She plucked some *bernes* and began to eat "What is the matter?" she asked the tree "Why are you so bitter?" The *bar-tree* replied, "Hark to the tale of the coal-black water, the limping stag and the tiny tree, the *chee-pee* bird and the bitter *bernes*—and now a pigmy thou shalt be " She had been a tall woman, now she became small She went home, and when her work was done, she took *pej* to the men of the house working in the fields "Come, brothers, eat," she said, taking food out of the pot. "Who is this?" said the men. "Our girl was tall, but who is this pigmy?" "Come and eat," she replied, "and I will tell you the secret!" When she had told them she said, "Now you shall all become cripples " And the ploughmen's bodies became twisted and contorted

All day long they ploughed and in the evening they went to their *Rani* When she saw them, she cried, "Rām, Rām, Rām, Rām, Rām, what has happened? Tell me, for whatever you may say, you are my helpers and protectors." "Very well," they said "Hark to the tale of the coal-black

water, the limping stag and the tiny tree, the *chee-pee* bird and the bitter berries, the pigmy maid and the ploughmen three " And then—

And then, the story becomes a little too Chaucerian for modern ears Here is another "merry winter's tale to drive away the time trimly " It is Hothu's story of Lāl, and it was told on a bitterly cold winter's night

There was a King who had six wives, but not one of them bore him a child Daily the King went out hunting One day he made a platform near a lake and sat there watching for animals to come to drink In the top of the tree sat the Queen of the Forest and she was weeping Her tear-drops fell on the breast of the King He called three or four servants, and said, "Look, look, water is falling on me " They all looked up into the tree, but could see nothing But there was a one-eyed man there, and he cried, "There is something there " Then he called to the Queen of the Forest, "Tell us, are you a goddess, or a demon, or a ghost, or what are you? Come down " But she replied, "No, I dare not You may beat me " But at last she came down and they prepared her a splendid meal which she ate "It seems," whispered the King's servants to one another, "as if she has not eaten for many a day " She stayed with the King for a night, and the next day he took her home with him

When the six queens saw it, they said, "So that is what he was up to when we thought he had gone hunting " In the city the news spread quickly and there was great excitement All the citizens came to the palace to see the Queen of the Forest Three nights passed and then with great ceremony the King married her The other queens were very jealous and would not talk with her, so that she felt lonely, especially as the King went out daily for hunting Two or three years passed and then God blessed the Queen of the Forest with a child She said, "Look, my King, daily you go out hunting, and leave me here alone Who knows what may not happen when the child is born." The King said, "I will put a big

bell on the top of the palace, and when the child is born, ring it, and I will come at once "

At last the child was to be born, and the King was away from home. In her pain the Queen of the Forest forgot to ring the bell. Then those six queens took her and pushed her into a grain bin by the small hole at the bottom. Her beautiful son fell down outside. They took him away and put a stone in his place. It was so dark there that the poor Queen could not see what had been born to her. The queens put the child in the buffalo-shed and hoped that the buffaloes would trample on it. After two days the King returned. They showed the stone to the King and said, "Your jungly Queen has given birth to a stone." He put his hands to his cheeks and with a face full of sorrow, sat down. Then the Queen of the Forest was shamed in four places and was sent away to work in the fields driving away crows. Then two of the queens went to see the baby and found a buffalo suckling him. So they took him to the goat shed instead. After two or three days the old man and woman who used to graze the goats came to clean the shed, and began to remove the grass and refuse. The woman found the baby, and wrapping it in a cloth took him away. Then she called the old man and said, "See I have found the son of the Forest Queen in the goat-shed." The old man killed a goat and made the signs of birth in his house and declared, "In our old age God has given us a son." Then he went to get milk medicine for his wife. At last milk began to flow from the old woman's breasts and she was able to suckle the child.

In eight months the child could sit and stand. In three or four years he could walk and run. He saw other children playing and asked his father to make him a bow and arrow. He shot green pigeons on the big tree and brought them to his father. In his catapult were seven stones. The other children often missed, but this boy always hit the mark. The children used to ride on horses to the river to bathe, so Lāl (for this was the name his foster parents gave him) went and asked his father to make a horse for him. The old man took twenty rupees to the carpenter and asked him

to make a horse for his son "You must have it ready in five days," he said "Here are ten rupees, and in five days I will give you ten more " In five days the carpenter brought Lāl his horse The boy kissed it and said, "You are the horse that will take me to my mother " Then he went with the other children driving his wooden horse They had a race, and the wooden horse went much faster than any of the others

Lāl went home and took his food Then he went to the river where the six queens were bathing and ordered his horse to drink, "Go, drink water," said he He dipped its wooden mouth in the water The queens heard him "Fool, why are you asking a wooden horse to drink? Has your father seen, or have you ever seen a wooden horse drink water?" Then the boy answered, "That is all right But have you seen, or has your father seen a stone born to a human being?" The queens began to murmur among themselves and their hearts beat fast Some of them bathed, others did not They returned home, but took no food, but they went and lay down on their beds "What has happened?" asked the King when he came in from hunting "Have you all got fever?" They told him what the boy with the wooden horse had said Into the King's mind the thought flashed, "Perhaps this is my true son" and he sent his soldiers to bring the boy to him The old man shivered with fright when he saw them The mother wept and cried, "What is going to happen to our boy?" But Lāl said, "Don't be afraid" and he went off boldly to the court There he told his story and when he had finished he said, "Go and bring the Queen whom you have kept in the fields to drive away the crows, and then I will prove all I have said "

Two soldiers went to bring the Queen of the Forest, and when she came, the King asked her to wait on the threshold Between Lāl and the Queen was placed a screen of seven-fold thickness Lāl said, "If the woman on the other side of the screen is my mother, then if she presses her breast, milk will flow it will drench the screen and will come into my mouth " Then the Queen of the Forest pressed her breast

going among the tree tops, and the girls swing to and fro in answer. The song is the cry of a thousand living trees, the music of the drums is the steady beat of the moving branches. All night they dance, men and women rivalling one another in the improvisation of their songs, until, lost in a rapture of movement, they seem to surprise the secret of the *Lilā*, the ecstasy of creation, that ancient zest in the glory of which God made all things.

This is the one cultural interest of the people, and it is by their proficiency in this that villages are praised or derided. Villages, to whom the rivalry of football teams is unknown, play dancing matches against one another. Long before dawn, the men get up and dress in their best clothes: they borrow the jewellery of their women-folk and wear turbans gaily decorated with peacocks' feathers. Then off they go to challenge some distant hamlet to dance the *Saila*, a varied and exciting performance reserved for men only. The village thus surprised hurriedly prepares food and drink for the visitors, and then for the whole day the two parties dance before an ever-growing crowd. A week or so later, there is a "return match," when the women of the second village surprise their challengers and make them dance the *Rina*¹ or women's dance.

And all the time they are singing, making a living poetry that is never written down, but recreated day by day in the very spirit of delight, sung under the bright moon or in the glow of a great log fire, to the crash of drums, the music of anklet and bangle, and the delicate movements of the feet. A girl dancer is compared by the Gonds to a lovely tree moving to the unseen power of nature, and one of their riddles asks, "There is a dumb bird that sits on a beautiful *śāy*-tree. Shake the tree, and the bird awakes and sings." The answer is, "The anklets on the feet of a girl who goes to the dance."

¹ The technique of these and other dances is described in a note at the end of this Introduction.

IV

"For the most part," says Aldous Huxley, "we impose our moods on the world *without us*, and *not* our moods *only*, our humanity, our mode of being. Incorrigibly anthropomorphic, man insists on trying to live in a man like world. And in civilized countries, and under a temperate sky, he is pretty successful. And in the home counties of England, for example, Nature seems to most people, and most of the time, reassuringly human—all too human, even. But every now and then something startling happens. For one reason or another Nature suddenly refuses to live with our life and partake of our mood. She turns round on the human spectator and gives him something utterly unlike his gift to her, reveals herself as a being either marvellously and beautifully, or else, more often, terrifyingly alien from man." This "disquieting and stimulating inhumanity" is constantly present to the Gond's outlook on Nature. It is the terrible, the ferocious, the bizarre that strikes the dweller in the forest.

*Huge and mighty forms, that do not live
Like living men, moved slowly through the mind
By day, and were a trouble to my dreams*

There is thus little to remind us of Wordsworth or Clare in the Gond nature-poems: the atmosphere is, if anything, Elizabethan. The Elizabethan natural world had not yet been worked into a whole: it was full of insulated spots: there were many things in the woods of Peele or Beaumont and Fletcher that did not quite make sense. And so a Gond would not have felt an utter stranger on the stage of *The Old Wives' Tale* or *The Faithful Shepherdess*, still less in the witches' dimble of *The Sad Shepherd*. But he would have been very shy of Goody Blake or Alice Fell so busily and piously incorporating themselves with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature. The Elizabethan did not read

his own moods into nature, but like the Gond, he wanted nature to provide an appropriate background to his emotions. The Gond would certainly have danced while Frolic and Fantastic sang

*Whenas the rye reach to the chin,
And chopcherry, chopcherry ripe within,
Strawberries swimming in the cream,
And schoolboys playing in the stream,
Then, O, then, O, then, O, my true love said,
Till that time come again
She could not live a maid*

And Beaumont and Fletcher, in another mood, would have sympathized with the beautiful little Gond *Karma*, almost Japanese in the economy of its drawing

*Outside, the rain is pouring down
Inside the house, a girl sits weeping*

For the Gond, as for the Elizabethan fantast, the forest is peopled by

*Goblin, wood-god, fairy, elf or fiend,
Satyr, or other power that haunts the groves*

In the deep glades of the forest lives the old wood god, who protects men from the terrors of the night, Nāng-Banshee Bāgeshwar Deo, lord of the wild beasts, has his home near rippling streams or by stones of curious shape. In the sacred fig-tree lives Brahma Deo, a spirit of no common rate, the spirit of renunciation. Sometimes he leaps on a man passing beneath his tree, and then for the period of his possession that man goes crazed in his wits. He strips himself naked, covers his body with dust and ashes, and begs his food. Machan, the Puck-fairy of the Gonds, lives under stones by the roadside, and teases the passers-by, stealing their goods and sometimes spoiling the crops of the villagers.

The *sāj*-tree is the abode of Burra Deo, the Great God of the forest the *nīm*-tree of Māta, goddess of small-pox. It is well not to build a house too near a *semur*-tree, for here a *raksha* may be hiding, that discomfited ghost of a man who has died without tasting the delights of love. A fire consumes him, and at night he steals out of his prison to the house of some village maid, and crops her virgin flower.

Yet the disquieting and stimulating inhumanity of nature is not the whole story. The Gond lives so close to nature that he has made a family affair of it. Within the tribe there are many exogamous septs which have a special bond with the natural world. Some are named after trees, the mango, the teak, the *mahuā*, and the members of the sept have a devotion to their particular tree, and never cut it. Others are named after animals, and have a special power over them, the tiger, the crocodile, the porcupine, the wild cat, the jungle dog. Once a party of Gonds were going through the forest, when a deer came running towards them, hotly pursued by a tiger. But one of the party belonged to the tiger family, and it is said that he stopped the tiger and the deer escaped.

When a boy is born into the tiger sept, the parents sacrifice a goat. They go first to the forest and scatter flour beneath some auspicious tree. If, during the night, the tiger comes and places his paws in the flour, they rejoice, and offer their sacrifice, for they know that it will be accepted. When they hear that a tiger has been killed, all the earthen pots in the house are broken, the old men shave their heads, and food is distributed in token of mourning. Once during a marriage at Karanjia, the spirit of the tiger came upon four men together suddenly. Leaping in the air, running on all fours, roaring and growling, they fell upon a live goat, bit it to death with their teeth, and drank the hot blood.

In the same way, at the *Jauāra* or Harvest Festival, it is a common thing to see the spirit of a monkey enter a man who begins forthwith to behave exactly like a monkey, mopping and mowing, climbing trees, chewing bits of fruit. And this is quite different from playing the fool at a party,

the man is out of his wits, genuinely possessed by something. The culmination of the *Saila* is the great Snake Dance. A long line is formed—each man clutching the man in front of him by the wrist—which dances round and round, in and out, in the manner of a snake. The aim of the man at the head is to catch and bite whoever is at the tail. If this happens, the victim—it is said—will die of snake-bite within a twelve-month. Should the leader of the dance become possessed by the spirit of the snake, the scene becomes tense, almost tragic in its excitement. The leader, drunk with wine and drugs, filled with the dark serpent power, leaps forward with daemonic energy, dragging the long line behind him. The tail swings to and fro in order to avoid his bite. At last the leader rears up into the air, his head flung back, mouth open, eyes ablaze, hissing savagely, until, utterly exhausted, he falls to the ground, and the dance is over.

At such times, man becomes one with Nature, not with its beautiful and permanent, but with its most wild and savage, forms. But it is a real ecstasy, even though terrifyingly alien from civilized man. In many villages there are men known as "horses" on whom the Great Mother can ride. The spirit of earth comes upon them, and they forget all the miseries of the present, lost in a strange rapture.

These men are believed to have an extraordinary power over nature. The Baiga priest claims to be able to control his tiger at least as well as St. Jerome managed his lion. When a man is killed by a tiger, the villagers, armed with axes and bows and arrows, gather at the spot. A Baiga makes a small image of the dead man out of earth, and places it on the very spot where his blood was shed. Then he tells a *katha*, beginning from the creation up to the time when the man was killed. As he finishes his story he falls into an ecstasy, and leaping up, rushes through the crowd into the forest. Then roaring like a tiger, and leaping in the air, he returns and tries to seize the image. But three or four of the bystanders catch hold of him and prevent him from going near it. They take a black cock and throw it into the air towards the forest, with the idea that if there is

a tiger there it will take the cock and leave them alone. At the same time they all shout at the top of their voices. By now the spirit of the tiger has left the Baiga, and he is able to carry the image down to the river. The people stand round in the water, holding a threefold thread. They sacrifice a chicken. Then they clap their hands to rouse the God, and the Baiga says, "For one generation let this spell endure. For two generations let this spell endure. From age to age let it retain its power. Drive the nail and break the thread. Let the dry cowdung sink, let the stones rise to the surface of the river, but let not this spell ever lose its power." Then they break the thread and immerse the figure in the river. Afterwards they return to the forest and drive a nail into a tree or a great stone and repeat the charm. This, they believe, will bind the jaws of the tiger so that he will do no further harm.

The tiger symbolizes, to the imagination of the Gond, all the wildness and grandeur of the forest. But other creatures also are given strange and even terrifying attributes. We have already told of Makramal Chatri, the giant spider, straddling across the high road under a dark sky, of Sāraglil, half-man, half-beast, sprawling on the ground, his vast jaws open so that one lip hangs on the earth while the other touches heaven, of the monstrous tortoise, Chakramal Chatri, with his two arms sticking up skywards from the primeval ocean.

The hyena, who preys on the bodies of the dead, first walks round a grave five times, then stamps upon it, and at that knocking the corpse rises slowly of its own accord out of the ground. In Mandla the Gonds tell of a monstrous crab that lies in wait for pregnant women and molests them. The crab is a lord of the underworld, and lives in a deep well dug by its own claws, filled with water from its body. Another lord of the underworld is the cobra, and one of the songs speaks of him roaring among the ant-hills, while his roate nods sleepily far below the surface of the earth.

But in other moods, the Gonds like to make fun of birds and animals, and to clothe them in a sort of Beatrix Potter

atmosphere The *padki* bird, for example, is the friend of the traditionally idle cow-herd At midday all the cattle are brought together in the shade, and the herdsman wants to go to smoke and chat in the village Then the *padki* bird comes and calls him, "I'll look after your cows, I'll look after your cows," she says In the evening, as the herd stamps its way back to the village, she sings again, "I've done your work, mother, I've done your work, mother"

Less respectable is the "bird of sin," for ever condemned to sing, "*Mor pihū, mor pihū* (my love, my love)" For once when her lord was going on a journey, she put ashes instead of flowers on his head, and he was so angered by this that he never returned to her There are endless tales about the parrot One kind of green parrot regards the earth as his father-in-law and never sits upon it as a mark of respect Even if it wants to drink water from a stream, it first brings a twig in its claws and sits on that, but never directly on the ground The parrot is the traditional go-between of lovers In the tale of Prince Dhōla, so popular in Chhattisgarh, the Princess Mārū ties her message of love round the parrot's neck and sends it to her beloved When the parrot has fulfilled its task she gives it sugar and a golden cage

The Gond has the power of seeing things from the animal's point of view He has a special and curious sympathy with fish, and there are certain definite ceremonies to be performed before he goes out fishing In one remarkable song, we see the world through the eyes of a fish—even Leigh Hunt, in his famous sonnets on Fish, did not enter more deeply into their feelings

*O why has a child been born in the fisherman's house?
From the day of their birth the fisher lads carry nets on their
heads*

*As she speaks, the fish begins to weep, Jer, jer
She broods on this thought till her whole life is weeping
It is such as these, she cries, that bring a doom upon us*

There can be no doubt of the intense love of the Gonds

for the forest. They call it *Nandanban*, Forest of Joy, and *Madhuban*, Forest of Sweet Desire. They often stop and point out some scene of special beauty. The loneliness and grandeur of the forest intoxicates them. Their songs are full of vivid little pictures, though rarely of long catalogues, of forest and village scenes—bullocks returning home in the evening through a fine drizzle of rain, fish leaping about and scattering the mud in the dried bed of a stream, the lovely little red and yellow *rainumiyā* bird hopping about the courtyard, a green parrot on a red hill, tiger's footmarks in the mud at the top of a lonely pass, dry leaves flaming in the forest fire, the bee among the blue petals of an *arasi* flower sipping first on one side, then on the other, the peacock spreading its fanlike tail, a dog barking at the moon and the night red with torches as the villagers come out to see what is the matter.

To love the good earth and serve the village community is no ignoble ambition. An old Gond was once talking with us of his reverence for Pawan Dassone, the Wind. "It moves within my mind," he said, "and I am its brother. Truly the wind is a great god, so strong and yet unseen, when it blows into my mind, it talks with me."

"And what does it say?" we asked.

"It tells me to take no heed of the lies that are in the world. There is no truth among men, only in work, in the labour of the fields is truth. So my wheat grows tall and strong, and the neighbours say it is because of my magic, but really it is because I seek truth with the hard toil of my hands."

V

Perhaps the most remarkable of the songs are the *Sajani*, or Satires, which reveal to us something of the bitterness of the domestic quarrels that disturb the peace of the countryside. Others mock at the pretentious, the vulgar, the wanton. We are shown the Gond view of landlords and the police. It is of great significance that even the primitive mind can

stand outside itself and criticize itself in this way. Other *Sajani* are cries of poverty and hunger, and *The Roadmenders' Song* is the Gond version of *The Song of the Shirt*.

The "Wives' Complaints" must not be taken too seriously. They must at least be balanced by the "Husbands' Complaints." In the Gond country husbands are less privileged and the women enjoy a greater freedom and dignity than in most other parts of India. The most striking thing about the Gond outlook on marriage is that men and women usually marry one another for love and not simply because their parents want them to. The "companionate marriage" is common, and the formal and expensive luxury of a marriage ceremony is often omitted. Nearly all Gonds are married once in their lives—officially, but many girls live with two or three men before they finally settle down, and as likely as not they are never actually married to the man whom they choose finally as a life-partner. Once they have chosen him and had children by him, they are loyal, faithful and devoted, loving and tender mothers, and companions and life-long lovers of their men.

Not a few Gonds regard women with awe and terror. We were talking to a Gond about women. "They are goddesses," he said. "We must worship them. But also beware. For they are very powerful. There is no limit to the power of the Evil Eye. Women can bring down the God of Fire from the sky, and at their command He will burn both crops and men. There was once an old man who was working with his grandchild in the fields. And a witch makes a ring of fire round them. The blazing grass rushes towards them from every side. That man thinks, Let me at least save the child. I will throw him through the fire into safety. He picks him up, but his arms are bound, there is no strength in them. He cannot move. The greedy fire comes closer and devours them both. So reverence women, but keep them at a distance."

The majority of the songs in this book are composed by women. All the *Pardhān Karma* songs, many of which are of real beauty, come from four women of one household,

the house of a leper Two of the women are the leper's wives, one his sister, the fourth his niece, herself married to another leper It is not surprising, therefore, that sorrow and mortality, the swift passing of all human joy, should be their most prominent themes Life endures but for two days, death is certain, and the loneliness of death, when we must travel onward alone For the body of man is no more than a spark quenched by rain, a straw devoured by fire, a bubble of water broken by the wind Love passes, separation is inevitable Man sows his seed in a hard land

The love songs are very beautiful Some are too coarse for printing, but many describe the art of love, and particularly the pangs of despised love, with great insight The poems are naked and unashamed, they are frank, bold, intense, there is nothing Platonic about them The Gond would agree with Donne —

*Whoever loves, if he do not propose
The right true end of love, he's one that goes
To sea for nothing but to make him sick*

Again and again one is reminded of the Elizabethan love-poetry, perhaps the finest and most direct love-poetry ever written If it were possible to make a *Karma* out of Carew's *Rapture*, all the Gonds would sing it with enthusiasm

For the Gond, romantic love is a necessity The life of the body is naturally of an enormous importance to him Life without a girl is wasted The finest house is dark if there is no wife to illuminate it Virginity is a rare and marvellous thing Lakshmanjan is revered for it So is Rai Linga But no Gond believes that it is a possible achievement for mere human beings In this world everyone is snared in the net of love

But it is not only wedded love and romantic love that the Gond enjoys he has also an elaborate philosophy of friendship There is nothing Greek or homosexual about these friendships The Gond, who in most cases has his first experiences with a girl long before the age of puberty,

would be horrified at the very idea. That is one of the things they do in cities. But it is not for the *madhuban*. These friendships bind primitive society together and even triumph over the barriers of caste: they are more lasting than marriages and are a unique feature of village life. There are endless grades and types of friendship, each with its own name, its initiation ceremony and its special obligations. The five most important form an ascending series. First is the *Bhaji*, or "pal," who stands by you in trouble. Then comes the *Sakhi*, a more religious and sacred bond, and the *Jawārā*, the romantic friendship, initiated when the friends place sprouts of green corn round each other's ears. The most intimate of all are the *Mahāprasād* and *Gangajal*. A man may have many a *Sakhi* or *Jawārā* but only one each of these. Nothing can break these friendships, there is no divorce, and they last beyond the grave. There are also a number of less serious, more sentimental, relationships—the *Gulābhūl*, or *Flower of the Rose*, the *Kelapān*, or *Leaf of the Plantain*, the *Amarbel*, or the *Immortal Creeper*, and so on. These friendships are normally, but not necessarily, between members of the same sex, but husband and wife share each other's friends.

For all his poverty, then, the Gond finds romance and joy in the village. The town appals him with its noise and bluster, where carts go without bullocks, puffing out clouds of smoke, and the streets are full of whores. It is the village that is the place for happiness, where the young forget themselves in laughter, and the old tell tales beside the fire.

*This little village is dear as the moon to you,
And from the great city you have dragged me away*

And so, in his singing, the Gond loves to give intimate details of his life in the field and forest, and this collection of his songs thus forms a book that might have been written by himself. It reveals the things that are important to him. Books on Indian village life are inevitably written by outsiders who record what seems important to them: but in these songs we have the villagers' own book about themselves.

A NOTE ON THE TECHNIQUE OF THE SONGS AND DANCES

THE KARMA is danced by both men and women. Among the Oraons it is a sort of Harvest Festival. A branch of a *Karma* tree is brought from the forest and gaily decorated. Then the young men and girls, linking their arms, dance round it in a great circle. The Majhwārs of Sargūja dance the *Karma* at the beginning and end of the rains, with them it is an act of religion, dedicated to Karam Rāja, to drive away sickness from the village. The Gonds and Baigas of Mandla, with the Binjhawārs of Bilāspur, dance the *Karma* at any time, as a recreation. The dance is formed as follows. A group of men with the drums stands in the centre, while a line of women is formed in front of them. Sometimes the women move to and fro, sometimes they circle round and round the men, sometimes, when the circle is very large, a few girls detach themselves from the rest and go round the men very rapidly in a direction opposite to that of the larger slow-moving dance. The best dancers attain the most delicate and intricate movements of the hands and feet, and after the dance has continued half the night, even the least expert become inspired and the entire company is possessed by the very spirit of rhythm. Sometimes the women begin the songs, and the men have to pick up the tune and the words and answer them—it is an amusing sight to see a few expert women dancers confounding a group of men—and sometimes the men take the initiative.

The *Karma* seems less popular in the western districts, where women are not accustomed to dance with men.

There are many varieties of the *Karma* songs, but they are classified according to their origin rather than by their form. Thus there are *Karma* of the hills, *Karma* of the forest, Baiga *Karma* and so on. The *Lahati Karma*, however, unlike the ordinary *Karma*, is rhymed and is sung more rapidly than the others. The Gonds say that once they are caught by the *Lahati*, they are lost to the world—they are

ready to leave wife and children, and families have been ruined by it

The form of the *Karma* song is simple, there is a refrain which is repeated again and again, and is called the *Karma* proper, and the *Ād* which forms the main theme of the song. Every *Karma* begins with a phrase—*Ho Ho re hā, O ho hā, O ho ho hai*, etc.—to indicate the tune and rhythm that is to be followed. Some of the songs are very long and elaborately worked out in intelligible sequence. Others pass from theme to theme with the vague inconsequence of a dream. Yet others are short and intense, conveying an entire scene with a great economy of words. There are many conventional refrains which are used whenever imagination fails and these have generally no connection with the main theme of the song.

In Chhindwāra and Betūl the favourite dance is the *DANDĀR PĀTĀ* or Stick Dance, performed by men only. They dance in two circles, passing in and out, beating their sticks together as they pass. We were not able to obtain any specimen of the longer songs, but a good one is given by Trench in his *Gondi Grammar*. The *Lahungī* is a short introduction sung at the beginning of the dance.

The *SAILA* is another form of the *Dandār Pātā*, and ought to be danced with sticks, but commonly a *Saila* danced with sticks is now called a *Dandār Pātā*. The *Saila* has become a very jolly dance, and admits of great variety and much buffoonery, though originally it may have had a more serious significance as the prelude to war or to the chase. Sometimes the dancers form a circle, each standing on one leg and supporting himself by holding on to the man in front. Then they all hop together round and round. Sometimes they pair off, and go round in single or double file, occasionally climbing on each other's backs. The climax of a day's *Saila* is the great Snake Dance. The *Saila* songs, of which the refrain is the monotonous *Nānāre nānā*, are usually of a progressive character leading to a highly vulgar conclusion.

The *DASERĀ* is a simpler form of the *Saila* danced by the Baigas. The men do not sing, but circle round to the steady

and monotonous beating of a drum Every time they change direction, they utter a thin bat-like cry that is weird in the extreme

The RĪNA is a dance for women only They go round and round in a great circle, bobbing up and down, and clapping the hands in a complicated movement Sometimes there are two rows of women who remain for the most part doubled up, now and then turning their backs on each other, and now and then kneeling on the ground and bowing to and fro The *Rina* is also called TAPADI by the Baigas

The JARPATH is a dance for boys and girls Gaily decorated, a row of boys faces a row of girls, with two drummers in between The rows advance and retreat, bowing and singing, while the drummers leap about and give an air of great liveliness to the scene

The songs for the *Rina* and the *Jarpath* are not unlike the *Karma*, save that for the former the invariable refrain is *Rina rina rihā-nā-rina rina rina rina* Like the *Karma* they are unrhymed and the metre is ruthlessly stretched to suit the needs of the dance, extra syllables or meaningless phrases being freely interpolated

The SAJANI songs are sung sitting round the fire at night Their origin is reflected in their character they are long, discursive, often rhymed, and in the longer *Sajani* there is something approaching a criticism of life and satire on contemporary society

The DADARIYĀ are much shorter and very simple. They are the forest songs, sung by the woodcutters as they chop their trees, or by workers in the fields. Some are anuphonal in form these are love-songs, sung by lovers on the opposite banks of a lake or river In Chhattisgarh they are known as *Banbhajan*, or forest songs.

The DHANDHĀ, Riddles, are often so poetic in thought and so closely reflect the life of the people that we have added a selection.

THE SONGS

I

THE MUSIC MAKER

Among the trees I'm playing on my flute.
But who careth for this poor forest-dweller?
No mother have I, nor brother, nor friend in all the
world,
All day I'm making music on my flute

Among the trees I'm playing on my flute.
A mother have I, and brother, and friends to eat with
me,
But none of them can help this poor forest-dweller,
So all day long I play upon my flute

In the shade of a creeper sits a man,
The scorpion bites him and he weeps
Who careth for the dwellers in the forest?
Among the trees I'm playing on my flute.

2

DEAR AS THE MOON

To you this little village is dear as the moon,
And from the great city you have dragged me away
Here if you want paper you must tear up your clothes,
For ink you must use the kâzal from your eyes
Yet to you this little village is dear as the moon,

3

THE PLACE FOR HAPPINESS

IN all the world a village is the place for happiness.
In every house are ploughs and bullocks,
And everyone goes farming.
When the villagers are working in the fields,
It looks like a festival.
With the consent of all, the fields are sown;
They are fenced with thorns to keep the jackals away.
Slowly, steadily, the rain fills all the tanks and wells and
hollows,
While the clouds thunder through the air and frighten us
out of our wits.
Some sing dadariyā: some dance the sāla: those who are
grazing cattle play on the bamboo flute.
After the ploughing the fields are thick with mud, but the
women dance as they sow the rice. }
Friends play, throwing mud at one another.
Some are smoking; some are chewing pān; some who are idle
sit gaping at the workers; while others sing.
In all the world a village is the place for happiness.

4

THE SHEPHERD'S SWEET LOT

In the month of Phāgun sings the koel, sings the maina,
The parsa blossoms into scarlet flowers.
The young forget themselves in laughter in the happy month
of Phāgun
In the village there is singing day and night.
The goodwife is busy cooking food
The men laugh uproariously, the girls, the water-carriers,
swinging their hips, come from the well
The girls go with their pots to the river in the evening,
And there they sit on the bank above the running water, and
sing their songs.
Every evening Uncle Moon comes to the village bringing
light
Sakhī and Jawārā sing together while the people come to
watch
The parsa flowers are powdered, the red powder is prepared,
They all throw it at one another
In the rich houses the old women are making every kind of
sweet.
O the young forget themselves in laughter in the happy
month of Phāgun

DRUMS AND THE DANCE

5

RIRĪNA RĪnā Rāhinā RĪnā! hé nārē suwaho!
 The dancers are dancing, the people gather round O!
 How lovely are the feet adorned with silver,
 How beautiful the ankles with their sounding rings.
 The dancers are dancing, the people gather round O!
 Rirīnā Rāhinā Ay!

6

UNDER the dark tree grows a thorn,
 The drum is dangling at my waist O!
 In whom shall we hope?
 In whom shall we trust?
 Trust no one but your friend.
 A new drum is dangling at my waist O!

7

O DRUMMERS, sweating in your toil,
 Drum to my heart's content.

8

PLAY your flute on the bank of the river.
 All the women have come to listen.
 The path is crowded with women,
 The women who wear all the sixteen ornaments,
 And dance in fourteen circles.
 They are playing seven times on the flute;
 Near the house they are beating the drum, in the road they
 are playing the fiddle.

9

O MY beloved, they are beating the drums far away in the
beautiful forest,
But I cannot go with you.
The echo of that drumming resounds among the hills.

10

O COME, my love, come home with me and sleep.
How can we spend the night of God in empty dance and song?
Whose is that bed, whose is that spacious bed?
Come, rest, my love, the time for sleep draws near.
O come, my love, come home with me and sleep.

SONGS OF POVERTY

11

O SWAN, come slowly from the sky,
And drink this cooling water from my hands.
When you are wealthy you have many friends,
But the poor man is ever companionless.
O swan, come slowly from the sky,
And drink this cooling water from my hands.

12

HE has taken away my food;
He has taken away my lands;
He has taken away my only drinking-pot.
God has taken away everything from me.
O never, never should man endure such poverty.

13

A JUNGLE COW destroys the tulsi growing on the forest path.
In that herd there is a darling calf that is their jewel.
In times of plenty everyone is your father and mother.
But when the hard days come, you are alone in the world.

14

ALAS! Alas! this year how am I to feed my children?
For the crop has failed.
I can pay my taxes by selling my plough and bullocks.
But how am I to feed my children this year?

15

THE landlord of our village has grown very poor.
He has sold his sister and bought a dhoti.

16

FAMINE

THIS year's famine has driven us mad.
What are we to do, brothers, what are we to do?
We get no profit on our sowing: we cannot even reap what
we have sown.
Come, let us go with our baskets bare of grain.
What are we to do, brothers, what are we to do?

The goodwife bids the husband, Come let us go work on the
road.
We shall earn two annas a day, and we can save half for the
morrow.
From village to village goes the sahib; prepare his bungalow.
To the aged he gives money: he makes the children sit and
eat with him.
Kodon has been true to his word this year: kutki has kept us
alive.
By falling at the feet of the mountains and hills,
They too have saved us.
But this year's famine has driven us mad.
What are we to do, brothers, what are we to do?

THE ROADMENDERS' SONG

HUNGRY and thirsty we break these stones in the heat of
the sun.

The chips of stone fly up and batter our naked bodies.

Our life is empty and useless.

Our naked bodies shine with sweat, the tears flow from our
eyes.

Sometimes the chips of stone pierce the flesh, and the blood
flows.

Those who have plenty of money gorge themselves with food,
and live peacefully at home.

But it is when the heat is greatest that we have the heaviest
work.

The ground burns beneath our feet: the sky blazes above.

The hot wind scorches our faces: why cannot we escape?

Sometimes the young men and girls die by the roadside,

Yet my sinful life will not leave me.

O mother, how long must I break these stones?

I am tired of living any longer.

In the cold days when all are warm in bed,

Then I must be breaking stones on the frosty ground.

In the night sleep comes not because of the cold.

All this I do and what do I get for it?

Only two annas for a long day's toil.

All this I do for my children's sake to keep them alive.

My flesh wastes away with this suffering: only my bones
remain.

O that I might die quickly, and return to earth in a different
form!

Hungry and thirsty we break these stones in the cold of
winter.

THE VILLAGE :

18

THE COWHERD

EVERY day the cowherd goes to call from house to house.
And while he gossips, all our cows go straying in the woods.
He does not know where they graze nor the river where they
drink,
For he sits all day and gossips, passing on from house to house.

.

19

THE SHEPHERDESS

- O SHEPHERDESS, your cow has escaped from the cowshed.
She puts sandal-blossom in her hair, and wanders
through the village.
- O shepherdess, your cow has run out of the courtyard.
She puts sandal-blossom in her hair, and wanders through
the village.
- O shepherdess, your cow has gone into the jungle.
With a stick in her hand, she has followed her cow to
the jungle.

20

LAMSENA

You have married me, yet you still give me water from a distance.
 Your parents have given me a useless bullock with a broken horn,
 And the broadest field to plough.
 Always I am sent to feed the bullocks in a forest of bamboos.
 Such is the sad story of my life.

21

BRĀHMINS AND KATARS

THE mahuā trees, stripped bare of fruit or flower,
 Are trembling in the breeze,
 All the Kalārs are roaring drunk in the village.
 Row upon row of Brāhmīns,
 Row upon row of Kalārs,
 What are they here for?
 All the Kalārs are roaring in a row.
 The Brāhmīns are here for selling *chūna* and *pān*,
 The Kalārs are here for selling wine.
 How does a Brāhmin sell his wares?
 How does a Kalār sell his wares?
 The Brāhmin comes with scales,
 The Kalār comes with bottles.
 All the Kalārs are roaring in a row.

22

THE LANDLORD

⁴_h OUR landlord is a liar,
His agent is a thief
For gānja the villagers
Would sell their own cattle

23

THE IMPOSSIBLE SHE

O LET me go to the bazaar, or I shall lose my money O!
On her club foot is a silver ring,
There's collyrium in her squinting eyes,
In her tattered ears an earring
She is dressed bright as the lightning
Off she goes to the bazaar,
And on the way she sings,
O let me go to the bazaar, or I shall lose my money O!

THIEVES

24

THE dog that had lost its way was barking in the night.
We all awoke and said, The thief has run away.
Tall are the bamboos; maybe he's hiding there.
Why should we keep awake? He must have run away.

25

THE dog barked at midnight,
So we knew that Jagatrām had run away.
Light the fires! Bring out the lights! ›
Search and see what he has taken.
The rogue has run away. See what he has stolen.

26

THE PRISONER

THERE are fetters on his feet: there are handcuffs on his
hands.
His waist is tied with a rope.
The police are dragging him away.
Are they going to hang him?
His mother and brothers and all the children follow.
Are they going to hang him?
O to-day my beloved has been torn away from me.

27

THE POLICE

A PATWĀRI should wear red garments.
O Jamindār, a constable or an Inspector should wear black.
Some of the villagers he puts in jail,
He claps handcuffs on others.
He sends the thief to jail,
He puts handcuffs on the Gond.
The good and the innocent he also troubles endlessly.
O Jamindār, black clothes do best become a constable.

28

A CONCEITED MAN

He is walking in the road,
As proud as any king.
He looks down on everyone,
For his house is full of riches.
If you don't bow down to someone,
God Himself will humble you.

29

A VULGAR MAN

ON his wrists are heavy silver bangles,
In his ears are golden rings.
From his mouth flows ever the red stream of betel.

30

A SKEW-EYED CARRION

O FRIEND, this one-eyed rascal is trying to seduce every one
of us.

If only we could catch him, we would make him skip.

We'd tie his hands behind him, and smack him in the face.

We'd drag him to the river's bank, and there we'd push him
in.

O if only we could catch him!

THE FLIRT

31

You earn two annas which you spend on yourself,
 And you live for coquetry
 You put on a red sārī and you try to seduce everyone
 You make a mighty row with little toe-rings,
And when you go to the well you walk quickly to make your
 anklets ring
 For an anna you buy bangles and a spangle for your forehead,
 With oil you part your hair from back to front.
 You put on your necklace and run to your mirror to gaze at
 yourself
 You take your friends to the bazaar, and there you go round
 and round, giggling for hours on end

32

AMONG buffaloes the bull,
 Among cows their lord
 So among a crowd of women,
 You can always spot the flirt

33

YOUR toe-rings sound chutuk chutuk,
 Your anklets ring rinjum, rinjum,
 As you go kudur, kudur, flirting, wriggling your body,
 All the two hundred parts move at once.

Then give me poison, she replies How long am I to bear this
 taunting?
 I am like one that stands in the water and yet dies of thirst
 There is no one who loves me enough to give me water
So poison me instead

29

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 In his ears are golden rings.
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 in.

O if only we could catch him!

THE SONGS

35

THE UNHAPPY MARRIAGE

ALAS, alas, I will have to run away with another man,
For my beloved has turned his mind away from me.
How eagerly, as I am cooking dal and rice, do I pour on the
ghee.
But as soon as we sit for dinner, you start quarrelling.
And my heart is weary of you.

I put hot fire in the basket,
Carefully I make the bed.
But as soon as we lie down to rest, you start quarrelling.
And my heart is weary of you.

TWO TOO MANY

36

ON the trunk of the beautiful sāj tree,
 There clings an ugly bark.
 So is a marriage where you wed two wives.
 You cannot eat or drink: your whole body weeps with
 misery.
 In a happy married life, there is no enemy like a second wife.

37

WHEN his two wives fight him, how unhappy is his lot.
 Girja is the younger wife; Sita is the elder.
 Girja is thin; Sita is fat.
 Girja is a flirt, but Sita is a prude.
 Girja is a fair girl; she catches him by the leg.
 Sita is dark; she pulls him by the shoulder.
 Girja slaps him on the face; Sita pushes him.
 Girja abuses him; Sita talks incessantly.
 Then Sita sulks in silence, but Girja goes on taunting him.
 Girja pulls his dhoti off, Sita takes his coat.

At last he loses patience.
 He takes a stick and beats them both.
 One is sobbing musuk musuk now; the other screams aloud.
 One cracks her fingers at him; the other stamps her feet.
 Now they are friends against their lord.
 Together they fall upon him and throw him on the ground.
 One tears his dhoti, the other rips up his shirt.
 One pulls him by the hair, the other by his moustache.
 Now he too abuses them—"You noseless, widowed,
 strumpets."

They are tired now and let him be
In his torn shirt, without a dhoti,
He runs away for shame
He goes to his *father's* house
There he is an honoured guest
Not for a month does he return

WIVES

38

• MOTHERS-IN-LAW are deceivers ever,
So do Gond women deceive their husbands.

She beats her own husband,
But she feeds her lovers on sweets.
To the husband in the house a broken litter for
sleeping;
To the lover beyond the gate a bed prepared with
care.
For the husband a tattered blanket;
For the lover a soft warm mattress.

She gives plain betel to her husband,
But to the lover supāri with pān.
To the husband she gives plain tobacco,
For her lover she adds some gānja.

Mothers-in-law are deceivers ever,
Gond women are the same.

39

OTHER folk control their wives by money,
But we by always keeping an eye on them.

THE UNHAPPY WIFE

40

You have got to go to the house of your father-in-law.
You'll get *no meat or fish to eat: you'll very soon tire of*
bones.
You may pick up the leavings of your mother-in-law, and
eat them bit by bit;
But though she'll be *flattered*, she'll *continue to run you down*. ;
O you'll have to go. There is no escape. You must go to
your husband's house.

41

SHOES are made to fit the feet; .
The horse must suit the rider;
But my parents will choose my husband by their taste, not
by mine.
Yet it is my fate and not theirs that is wrapped up in the
husband.
Alas! Alas! But what does it matter?
Life is but a bubble on the water that is broken by the wind.

42

THE WIFE'S COMPLAINT

O SISTER, my husband is more than I can bear
At cock-crow he takes me by the hair and throws me out
of bed

Then he drags me to the threshing-floor and sets me to work
The palms of my hands are rough, my arms are stiff,
My back is aching, and my waist and legs are full of pain

In the house everyone else gets lots of rice to eat
But I am given peṭṭu

The other women trot about proudly in their new saris,
But I am not even given an old one

They keep watch over me,

They tie me with a rope as if I were a cow
How can I describe this poor girl's troubles?

The other women in our house do not have to carry even the
smallest vessels of water,

But I must fetch it in the biggest pot of all

The others have pāṇ to eat, oil for their hair, the spangle on
their forehead, kāṇḍaḷ in their eyes

But I am not even given oil

Always they call me, Widow, Orphan, Devourer of your
Husband's Wealth,

And then if I get angry, they threaten to kill me

THE YOUNG WIFE

43

O I *am* young, I am young, and my husband has
gone away
By day I *die* of hunger and thirst,
At night I perish with cold
For my lord is far away from me

In the house the very best rice is cooked, and
vegetable and pulse,
But now that he is gone away, I die of hunger
there

44

As an ear of corn is good to eat,
So should a child be born to young parents.
Mother and child can then play together
But when the grain is withered,
A child should not be born

45

THREE BHADANI, OR MARRIAGE SONGS,
FROM SEONI

(a)

A SNAKE shines like lightning in the stream.
O brother, come with me!
O sister, I care not for the stream!

(b)

She says, I do not love you.
So he is frightened.
His friend says, Catch her by the hand;
Don't be afraid to slap or kick her.
But she will not come out.
They say, why won't you come out?
I have not yet dressed;
I have not yet put on my rings.

(c)

She says, I do not love him.
Burn him with a thorn bush.
And after that I will enjoy myself
Giving gifts to all my friends.

46

I won't go with you to your father's house.
I'd like to burn it down.
On this side is Ganges: on that is the Narbada.
Where she ought to meet her husband, she greets
another man.
I'll burn your whole countryside before I go with
you.

THE HUSBAND'S COMPLAINT

47

I TALK to my girl, but she will not answer me
I have married her, and in a decorated litter I have
brought her home,
But she does not care for me
A woman has taken one of the drums, a man is
beating another,
They are dancing every kind of dance

O gently blows the wind, and happy I should be,
But my girl does not care for me
For our marriage-pole we cut a tall sandal tree,
But my girl cares nothing for me

48

I MARRIED a little motherless girl,
I thought to spend my life with her
But when I took her to my home,
She ran away with another man

49

O WHEN I was a child, I played in mother's lap!
But now I am grown, I must share another's life
Tell me, O tell me, the joys that lie beyond
When I was a little girl, I played with other children,
But now I must share the life of another
Yet remember, my lord, that I am still a child
If your child cannot content you,
You must be patient with her

50

DAR, dar, dar, my wife is weeping;
 From her eyes the tears flow like a stream
 O my beloved, why are you weeping?
 God will save you from your enemies
 If it were written in a book, I would read it,
 But who can read his fate?

51

THE LOST CHILDREN

O WHERE am I to find them, my two lost children?
 As I toil along the road, one mile seems like two
 My feet are torn, my body is like a load of earth
 How long must I go searching for my children?

52

THE CREEPER

We have planted chili in our courtyard
 See how it sprouts on this side and on that!
 The creeper climbs upward and its fruit hangs over
 the fence

We have planted guava in our courtyard
 See how it sprouts on this side and on that!
 The creeper climbs upward and its fruit hangs over
 the fence

53

THE SNEEZE

I WAS going along the road and lost my way,
When I came to the cross-roads I sneezed
Why did I sneeze when I came to the cross-roads?
O sneeze, why have you stopped me on my journey?

; THE TATTOOER

54

YES, I will give you a pangle for your forehead,
But it will break very soon
Let me tattoo you instead,
And that treasure will last all your life

55

THE tattooer has come, now you must be tattooed.
On your arms and legs you shall have marks worth
twenty-five rupees.
O my love, I cannot live without you
Where has the tattooer come from? Where shall I be
tattooed?
The woman has come from Pendra.
She will tattoo you on hands and feet.
She will tattoo you for twenty-five rupees.
O my love, I cannot live without you

56

THE FLOWER-GIRL

THE Mālin sits on the hill-top,
She breathes the air of the morning.
The sack on the ox's back is swaying to and fro.
The carrier staggers as he tries to keep it steady,
For his eyes are fixed on the hill-top.
O the sack is slipping off,
Cries the Mālin on the hill-top.

57

THE TEASE

WE were bringing water from the well.
On the way that Moslem boy began to tease us.
I'll touch your pots, he cried, I'll touch your pots.

58

THE handle of the plough is short;
Long is the ox-goad.
In one round they finished sowing the grain.
Who are the ploughmen?
The ploughmen are father and son.

59.

SOMEONE is crying aloud,
In the field of wheat a deer is caught.
The man is running after it.
Go slowly, or you too will break your leg.

60

BAKE our bread in the evening,
For we will start at midnight.
We must be beyond the river before dawn

61

THERE is fire in the cake of cowdung,
And in the cold a girl sits warming her cheeks

62

A DEER stands on the hill-top
Girls gather at the well
A horseman comes from the forest.
They ask, Who can that be?
Where can he be coming from?

63

TAUNTING

My skin has turned black through your taunting, O beloved.
It is not my taunting that has made you black.
It is because you eat black brinjals.
O my beauty, do not eat them any more.

64

THE SWAN OF MY HEART

THE swan of my heart is an ascetic.
Had he been a monkey he would have lived in the house of
a sadhu who would have taken him from door to door,
and made him dance for a living.
But the swan of my heart is an ascetic.

Had he been born a bullock in the house of a Tēli, then his
master would have bound his eyes and made him go
round and round the press.
But the swan of my heart is an ascetic.

Had he been born a horse in a rich man's house, he would
have been ridden from street to street.
But the swan of my heart is an ascetic.

65

STRENGTH WITHOUT WIT

WITHOUT your help, how can I cast my net?
I can break the two tusks of an elephant
I can smack a tiger on the face
I can even give grain to a donkey
But how can I cast my net without your help?

66

THE English road goes to Bombay
From Bombay come the telegrams
There carts go without bullocks,
And puff out clouds of smoke

67

EVERY bullet falls *tapak tapak*,
Like a stone in water
The arrows shoot into the sky
Guns, nine yards long, are roaring,
The swords rise and fall

68

THE panther roars on the mountain,
The tiger roars in the forest,
The king roars on his throne,
With sword and shield in hand

69

WASH the king's fine turban carefully,
So that he can stand at his window,
And wink at the passing girls.
The whores of Seom have run out of their houses.
Wash the king's fine turban carefully

SAILA SONGS

70

TARIHARI nānā, nānārē nānā!
 He went to fetch mangoes from the forest,
 He threw his stick into the tree—
 But it hit her little finger O!
 And in her wrist she felt the pain.

He threw his stick into the tree—
 But it hit her on the wrist O!
 And in her elbow she felt the pain.

He threw his stick into the tree—
 But it hit her on her knee O!
 And in her thigh she felt the pain
 Nānārē nānā! nānārē nānā!

*:

71

..

O BROTHER, get up, a scorpion has bitten me.
 Brother, get up and stop the pain.

What will you give me in return?

I will give you the ring on my finger.
 Brother, get up and stop the pain.

What will I do with the ring on your finger,
 When I have neither home nor wife?

I will give you the bangle from my wrist.
 Brother, get up and stop the pain. . . .

72

THE leaves of the amar tree are very oily.
 A girl climbs up the tree to pluck the leaves.
 But as she climbs her skirt catches on a branch
 And as she climbs her sari catches on the branch
 And as she climbs her jacket catches on the branch .

73

O LOVELY girl, a crane is dancing
 In the jewel on your forehead.

She goes to the well to clean her anklets,
 But she loses the bells and their music ceases

She returns to the well to clean her bangles,
 But she loses her bangles and their music ceases

She returns to the well to clean her necklace,
 But she loses her necklace and its music ceases .

74

O GIRL, go grind beneath the distant mango tree
 There is the grinding-stone.
 Grind, and make your brother grind with you
 There is a swing
 Swing and make your brother swing with you
 There is a bed
 Sleep and make your brother sleep with you

75

FROM the top of the tree the monkey chatters.
Which brother has the gun?
Which brother has the arrow and the bow?
O the chatter of that monkey!
Little brother has the gun,
Big brother has the bow and arrow.
O the chatter of that monkey!
Which brother says, I will shoot, I will shoot?
Which brother shoots the arrow?
Little brother says, I will shoot my gun,
Big brother shoots the arrow.

THE VILLAGE WELL

76

WITHOUT my pitcher, how can I draw water?
What is the price of the little pitcher and the large?
The little pitcher is of gold, the big one is of silver
Who is that going to draw water?
The girl is going alone to the well for water
But what careth the big pitcher for the little one of gold?

77

A FAIR and slender girl has gone for water to the well O!
Lift the pot from her head for fear she may be hurt.
That cloth, what is it made of? And what kind of pot is this?
The cloth is made of silver, the pot is made of gold

78

WITH a beautiful pot of bronze on her head,
The shepherdess goes to the river
There's a fair cloth on her head
Now she is bending over the stream to fill her pot with
water,
And when she comes home she says to her husband,
Carefully lift the pot from my head,
For my waist is hurting me
Old mother, lift the pot from my head
Father, please get up from the threshold,
For my lord is coming to take my pot

79

IN our court the well is deep,
The water bubbles up from hell
O mother, the silken rope is broken,
The bucket has fallen down
So why should I go for water,
What need have I for a pitcher?
Why must such a pretty girl go to fetch water?
In our court the well is deep,
The mouth of the well is narrow,
The water is down deep as hell

80

O LITTLE well, you give no water
Your youth is past
Think well, your youth is ended

81

THE grasses grow on the bank of the stream,
They tremble in the wind
I must go to the river to bring water,
But I am afraid,
Yet I must take my pot, and the cloth for my head,
And someone will go with me
My cloth is made of gold, my pot is made of silver
As I go my head will tremble,
And they will shine in the sun
The light from that gold and silver
Will flash like the lightning

SONGS OF THE RAIN

82

Do not send me to bring water,
 For the edge of the well is slippery,
 As the edge of clouds in the sky
 Where is the thunder? Where is the water that
 breaks through the clouds?
 O do not send me to the well for water!
 In the month of Asād, from dark clouds the thunder
 rumbles.
 In Srāvan, the rain is gentle and the water clean
 In Bhādon, the days are dark, but in the darkness
 shines the lightning.
 O do not send me to the well for water!
 In Kuṣṭr, the mud is washed off our walls
 In Kāruk, they light the lamps for Dīwālī
 O do not send me to the well for water!

83

In the month of Srāvan lightly falls the rain,
 But in Bhādon it pours down in torrents
 O how I long to see my beloved,
 But between us flows the flooded river
 If I had a little boat, I would cross the river in it,
 And when I reached his house I would sleep in his
 arms
 But when I long to see him, the river is in flood.

84

OUTSIDE, the rain is pouring down,
 And in the house, a girl sits weeping

SONGS OF THE FOREST

85

THE rain is drizzling slowly,
But it brings down the mud on the river's bank
O river-bank, bury me beneath that mud,
For now I nevermore desire a lover

86

GENTLY, gently, falls the rain,
In the courtyard moss has gathered
A little orphan girl has slipped on it
The old mother has run to catch her,
But she has caught hold of the branch of the
mango tree

87

IT is raining hard,
And all the boundaries of the fields are flooded
When I hear the thunder, I am afraid and cannot
sleep

88

IT is the month of Srāvan,
The sky is thick with clouds
There is a slow drizzle of rain,
And the bullocks are returning home

89

BEHIND a veil of rain
The clouds thunder
Roaring the water falls
I cannot see my player on the flute,
And joy has left my heart

90

THE flooded river is between us
My house is here, his on the farther bank.
How will he come to me?

91

I AM a stranger here,
The rain falls in torrents from the sky
Water is round my feet,
My clothes are drenched
Let me in for the night
But she says, I am afraid,
My brother will abuse me
No, I will make him drunk with wine,
And then he'll let me in

92

O FLOODED is the river, its stream is swirling by,
Help me, O help me, across the rushing water!

But what will you give me when we have crossed over?

I will give you a beautiful ring from my finger,
If you'll take me across the river

But what will I do with a ring from your finger?

I will give you the bangle from my arm,
And the chain from round my neck,
If you'll take me across the river

But what will I do with one of your bangles,
What do I want with the chain from your neck?

SONGS OF THE FOREST

Then when you have taken me over the river,
You may fondle my breast and find happiness there.
Only do take me over this flooded river.

But why should I want to fondle your breast?

You may even enjoy me a night and a day,
Only take me over the river.

Then we'll stay together a night and a day,
When I've taken you over the river.

FISH

93

THE rain-storm gathers in the sky
Ganges and Jumna are flooded with its water
Where has the water gone?
Down the throat of the fishes
And the fishes, where are they?
They are playing and dancing in the river

94

WE started from the house, but we stopped at the gate,
Then we went to the river bank,
Where we bathed, and the dirty water flowed away

One foot follows the other, on and on, till we reach the river
We bathe ourselves in the river, and the dirty water flows
away

We dam up the river above and below,
From the midst we throw out the water

As we go on throwing out the water,
Our backs begin to ache,
So we go to rest in the cool shade.

We bathe ourselves in the river, and the dirty water flows
away

95

ON the hook they hang a worm!
O friend without a lover, come
And quietly draw me to your side

96

WE will go and fish under the sāṃ tree,
 We will go there to kill the fish
 The net is twelve feet long
 When we throw out the water,
 All the tiny creatures die,
 And the fish start playing Phag

97

THE fish Singnī says,
 O why has a child been born in the fisherman's house?
 From their birth the fisher boys carry nets on their heads.
 As she speaks, the fish begins to weep, Jer, jer
 She broods upon this thought till her whole life is weeping
 It is such as these, she cries, that bring a doom on our lives

98

THE fishermen are killing fish
 As the field to the peasant, so are fish to the fisherman
 Some are killing jhinga
 Some are killing kotri
 Some are killing gohoria.
 Who kills the jhinga?
 Who kills the kotri?
 Who kills the gohoria?
 Little brother kills the jhinga
 Big brother kills the kotri
 But the gohoria escapes
 O fisherman, to you the fish are as a field of wheat

99`

As the fish go up the river,
They join fin to fin, ~
And they all go up together.

Take your chapar and go a-fishing.
Who makes the kumni?
Who makes the bissera?
Who makes the chapar?

Little brother makes the kumni.
Big brother makes the bissera and chapar

As the fish go up the river,
They join fin to fin,
And all go up together.

BIRDS

100

O FOREST-BIRD ! O forest-bird !
 You want ankles for your feet O !
 You want a necklace for your throat O !
 But where will you get their price, here in the
 beautiful forest ?
 O forest-bird !

101

THE mangoes ripen one by one,
 The tamarind bears fruit in clusters
 The jamun grows on the topmost branches of the
 tree,
 So that the birds can eat it very easily
 Yet the bird says in her mind,
 I can get nothing to eat,
 Nought is there in life for me to enjoy

102

THE ramuniya bird is hopping about the courtyard,
 O ye women who love the Karma, begin to dance

103

ON the flat top of a hill there is a tank,
 Where a parrot has its home
 There it says to itself, Rām O Rām !
 In the tank is a broken pipal tree,
 And on the tree are flowers
 By the flowers grow little buds
 Above them all is that parrot's cage,
 Where it says to itself, Rām O Rām !

104

How empty is the cage without a parrot!
Without breath the body cannot stand upright.
Without a girl, how lonely is the house!
Day after day it grows dirtier

105

THE char tree ripens on the hills,
There the parrot is talking
Little brother, go and see what it is saying,
And then I'll run away with you

106

ON the mountain of red earth, a green parrot had its home
On this side lived a pigeon, on that side lived a maina
The one was sold for five rupees, the other went for ten
On the mountain of red earth, a green parrot had its home

107

A WANDERING girl has lost her way,
O where has she lost her way?
The peacock's mate has lost her way,
O where has she lost her way?
The wandering girl has lost her way among the fields,
The peahen has lost her way in the forest.

108

THE cuckoo is crying in the garden.
Why hasn't she made her nest?
Where has she laid her eggs?
Why doesn't she hatch her brood?

109

TALL is the mahua and widely spread its branches.
A peacock is sitting in the topmost branch.
O peacock, why are you weeping?
Someone has cut off the feathers from my head.

110

THE parrot comes from the Forest of Joy,
The peacock comes from the hills.
Who has brought up the parrot?
Who has brought up the peacock?
The queen has cared for the peacock,
The king has cared for the parrot.
What does the parrot eat?
What does the peacock eat?
The parrot eats pearls,
And the peacock eats rice.

THE FOREST

111

O THE jungle full of tigers! How shall we escape? Ho!
He meets a tiger and he says,
It is so written in the Book of Fate,
That I should die
O the jungle full of tigers! How shall we escape? Ho!
In the narrow mountain-pass,
The pass that's choked with mud,
Even there are tigers' footprints
O the jungle full of tigers! How shall we escape? Ho!

112

He is cutting bamboo in the forest,
He has an order for it.
My life is alone in the forest,
And he is not afraid

113

You have taken gānja,
And now you are walking crookedly along the road
But my friend, beware, this is a forest road,
So do not walk carelessly

114

In front is a mountain behind there lies the forest.
Where are you going, beloved? Take me with you
to the forest.
For as dry leaves flame in the forest fire,
So my life burns for you

115

I WAS on my way home;
Why have you called me to this hiding-place?
The hens are scratching for their food in the forest;
A goat is munching in a thorny bush.
I was on my way home;
Why have you called me to this hiding-place?

116 /

IN the secret place of the forest,
I am going to capture you,
For your body is wonderful to me.

117

MY house is on the river bank.
Twelve miles away, as I was walking home,
I heard among the trees the voice of my beloved.
I left the dish I eat from,
I left the cup I drink from,
I left the man I'd married,
When I heard in the forest the voice of my beloved!

118

TEN mainas sit in the branches of the mango.
He promised to return within ten days.
But a month has gone by, and he has not come.
He went to the jungle to cut a sāl tree.
Ten mainas sit in the branches of the mango.

119

PLANT the mango, plant the tamarind and plantain
Clusters of fruit will weigh their boughs
Plant ten kachnār trees for flowers
In a garden set the tulsi
Water them unweariedly, but they will always wither
But the trees in the forest,
Which depend on God alone,
Never wither and die
The forest trees grow always

120

ON every side I see nothing but the trees of the forest
And you are alone, standing by the well

121

WE have brought bamboo from the jungle,
And now we are splitting it
If you can't find any clothes for your body,
Cover yourself with the bark of the bamboo .

122

So rare a girl alone!
Is there not anyone
To go with you to the forest?

123

ON every side is the great forest
The foxes are running to and fro
But even so, friend, I shall go into the forest

124

I WILL build you a house in the forest
Fenced by a silver wall,
The goldsmith has come to the village.
I will buy a treasure for you.

125

THE bamboo was cut in the valley,
It was carried across to the hills.
When they cut it, they made a love-philtre,
From the top they fashioned a flute.

126

O MY beloved, take your axe
And go to the forest-covered hill.
There are new logs there.
Cut them, my darling,
And we will make a beautiful house.

IMAGINATION AND FANCY

- 127

THROUGH the wind the moon is travelling to her home
A bee is sitting on the *arsi* flower
See how she is enjoying it, her head first on one side, then
on the other

128

He picked a mango from the tree
Though it was raw, he liked the taste
Who climbed your mango tree?
Who picked the mangoes from your tree?
Who is throwing stones to bring the mangoes down?

He picked a mango from the tree
Though it was raw, he liked the taste
My friend has climbed the mango tree
My friend has picked the green mangoes
But it is my lover who is throwing stones up into the
tree

129

In the court a dog is barking,
In the house a cat is *mewing*
And your voice from the top of the hill
Sounds like a *padki* bird,
Or a dove adorned with diamonds and emeralds.
Many letters have I written to you,
But never have I had an answer

130

O you dumb girl, I would like to shake you.
 Even a cat says maiow, maiow!
 Even a fox cries feh, feh!
 But you dumb girl say nothing, and I'd like to shake you.

131

WHAT has happened to the little jurgce bird?
 It has gone down to the river to weep there.
 It has gone down from the bank and is weeping in the river.
 O what has happened to the little jurgce bird.

132

IN what month sings the bird of sin?
 In what month does the jingra buzz?
 In the month of Jeth the sin-bird sings,
 In the month of Bhādon the jingra buzzes.
 O ye women of Rāmnagar carrying your water-pots,
 Hark to the voice of the jingra!
 It looks so ugly, yet its voice is sweet.
 If I could get such a jingra,
 I would keep it near my heart.
 I would tie its feet with golden chains.
 On its wings I would set tinkle bells.
 Then when it walked its chains would clang,
 And when it flew the bells would tinkle.

133

THE stars are thundering in the sky.
 Among the ant-hills the cobra roars.
 Under the earth the cobra's mate is nodding.
 And the eagle dances across the sky.

134

THERE IS a moon to-night come, let us go a-fishing
How brightly shines the moon
The jingra is crying, junjor, junjor
The ant has raised its head to listen
The sīras bird goes to and fro for alms
The parrot who honours the earth
Has gone to drink water in the ocean
The five arrows fly across the sky

135

O cuckoo, take my message!
Thy lover awaits thee in the garden
But how shall I send him my letter,
O who will carry my message?
Thy love awaits thee in her garden
I will send my message by a parrot,
I will send my letter even with a crow
Thy love awaits thee in her garden

136

A PEACOCK spreads her fan-like tail on high
The guest spreads love throughout the house

137

IN the front of the house is a munga tree,
Near the back door grows a bel
The river flows past the garden,
So we never will die of thirst

138

NOISILY tumbles the brook,
But the river flows peacefully.
You married me, but now you treat me as a foe,
And so my life is sunk in misery.

139

I SAT with my mother to cook the dinner.
A hyena came and carried off the dead man's leg.
I sat with my mother to cook the dinner.
A crow flew down and plucked off the nose.
I stirred the rice in the pot with a spoon.

140

YOUR body might have come from the loins of a prince.
Lovely are you as the milky heart of a coconut.
Your body captures the mind with its beauty,
And my life lives within your life.
In the dark clouds there are nine lacs of stars:
The sun and the moon have begun to sink,
And you have come instead as moon of the earth.

141

IN the village an ant died:
The chamār took away her skin.
It was nine hundred yards in length:
He made fifty shoes from it.

142

THERE were two friends, a crab and a frog
They decided that one of them should marry a prawn,
So the crab married her
At the marriage that clever water snake played the drum.
The snake asked, How did you find such a beautiful bride?
What medicine did you use?
I spent eight cowries, and bought the medicine,
And made her mad with love for me
From Ramnagar came a scorpion,
And played the cymbals without being asked
Then all the children began to scream

143

O WHAT shall I sing to-day?
Our dun buffalo eats twelve baskets of chaff
But when our cart is stuck in the mud,
It goes round and round,
But it can't pull it out.

144

THE jungle rat digs in the earth for food
Girls ask for money
A man searches for a wife

145

PLANT a mango, plant a tamarind,
Beneath them plant a lime tree
Cool yourself in their shade
The wind will whisper surur surur
In that cool breeze you will long for home
And you will say, O if only I could see my mother and my
sister
They would be the beauty of my eyes.

146

BLOSSOM is in her hair
 Beautiful is it as the plantain flower
 Some flowers bloom in the dawning
 Some flowers bloom at the dead of night.
 The flower of holiness blooms in the morning and in the
 evening
 At midnight blooms the flower of sin

147

O GOLDSMITH, hasten, and prepare for my adorning
 My lord is waiting, I have to go with him
 The elephant is weeping in his shed
 The horse is crying in the stable
 The fishes are lonely in the well
 O goldsmith, hasten, prepare for my adorning
 My lord is waiting, I have to go with him
 Under the stone, a crab has borne a child
 By digging in the ground she has made a tank.
 O goldsmith, hasten, prepare for my adorning,
 My lord is waiting, I have to go with him

148

MY pet deer looked at me with loving eyes.
 But I killed my deer with a bullet from my gun.

149

O MONKEY, all your life you have danced on the top branches
 of the trees,
 But now how am I to make you dance on your little chain?
 He drinks water with both his hands,
 But in his heart there is deceit.
 How am I to make you dance on your little chain?

150

O SLEEPER rise, if thou would'st see
At midnight the fig burst into flower.

The feet adorned with rings are beautiful.
Look at her throat, the necklace circling it

The anklets make the ankles beautiful.

From the toes I will remove the rings.

How shall I know if our thoughts agree, O friend

O sleeper rise, if thou would'st see
At midnight the fig burst into flower.

RELIGION

151

THIS is the place where the darbar of the gods is held.

This is the place where Bhīmsen, Mahādev and the other gods keep state.

152

O MOTHER-ODDESS of our village, thou hast blessed us.

Thou hast given us the best dances in the world.

Thou hast led us to the gods of the village.

With folded hands we worship them.

In our midst is the god Hardūl Baba.

With folded hands we worship him.

In our midst is the god Bhīmsen.

With folded hands we worship him.

153

O CLOUDS, you are our teachers.

We worship you.

Earth, you are our mother.

We worship you.

Kairo Māta, we worship you.

154

THREE girls from Mandla have come to pray.

Jungle Deo, we fall at thy feet.

Kairo Māta, we fall at thy feet.

Earth Mother, we fall at thy feet.

155

BROTHERS, this dandār that we play,
To what god does it belong?
It is the dandār of Mother Earth
No, it is the dandār of Nāg Deo

156

You may plant a mango or a tamarind,
Or a myrabolam tree
You may bring up another woman's child,
But what can you do for them?
God alone can protect them

157

WHAT care I if all men scorn me,
If God remembers me?
This life is very precious,
For hardly can it be created
God alone can make it.

158

THE peasant who labours to shake the mangoes
from the tree,
He is the true devotee
But if they fall where he cannot pick them up,
What profit in his toil?
A child goes to the temple,
He shouts, and hears the echo of his own voice
What profit in his prayer?

159

For walking here and there your feet are made
For flying there are wings
Your mouth is given you for speech,
And both your eyes to look on God

160

I CANNOT sing the holy praise of God,
I cannot sing, I cannot sing,
Because of you, O robber of my heart
Come, touch my breasts—I cannot sing
All my love is for you—I cannot sing
As in the dark clouds the moon is hidden,
So will I hide you in my love
I cannot sing the holy praise of God,
I cannot sing, I cannot sing

LOVE SONGS

161

Come by this road go by that road
As you journey, hold in your mind the image of
your darling,
And let that love be seen in your eyes

162

In every little lane there is a garden,
In every village there are flowering trees
Let me rest awhile in your garden
You may eat, you may drink, but life
without a girl is wasted
So let me rest in your garden of flowers.

163

MOJIAN, don't tumble me so
You are tearing my clothes to bits.

164

I HAVE come, O I have come,
I have come for love of you.
My mother is busy in the house,
My brothers are away from home,
I have left my two children in the swing,
And I have come, O I have come,
For love of you

165

ASLEEP in the court,
The night grows cold
Awake, my love,
Let us go into the house

166

I STAND outside your door
You are within and care not
But I will drag you out,
Life of my mind

167

You have built a house of stone,
You have made a door of stone
For a few nights let me stay with you,
And then I'll go to a distant land

168

I AM looking out of my house,
The sun is but a bamboo's length above the hills
Where can you go now it is grown so late?
Leaf of the Plantain, lover in whom my heart is wound,
Like a dry leaf in the wind,
You are ever blown to and fro away from me.
Where can you go now it has grown so late?

169

IN my dish is milk and rice,
There is water in the pot.
O lover, eat and drink
How shall our two lives be joined?
Come, let us go beneath the shade of the palm tree.
Then again I will give you milk and rice,
And water from my pot to drink.
Come, let us go beneath the palm that gives us wine
Then afterwards I will put you to sleep in my arms,
And see, my king, that you do not crush my breasts.

170

THE mangoes grow in clusters,
O laden is the tamarind
As near as seed to fruit,
So close should be our love

171

I HAVE crossed a broad river,
I have climbed a great forest-covered hill,
For love of you
Do not deny me - speak at least to me

172

You live among the hill-tops,
And I on the bank of the river
To-day you are young and fair,
And my love for you will endure,
Till the flesh rots on my bones

173

Do not lose the cloth that hides my breasts,
Or later you will miss it and be sad

174

ON the river bank they are throwing little stones at one
another O!
Then he says, Go home, my love, or your mother will curse
you,
And when it's time for dinner, you'll cry into your food
You'll be eating it and weeping I understand it all
So run home quickly, or your mother will curse you
On the river bank they are throwing little stones at one
another O!

175

WHERE have you been that you come so late?
O she was under the tamarind tree,
Or she may have been under the mahuā tree

176

TO DAY my guest is very happy in the empty house
My husband has gone away, with his father and mother
My guest is happy in this lonely house
My husband's younger brother and his little sister have gone
away,
And I am all alone in my lonely house,
And to-day my guest is very happy in the empty house
But O my husband's come again
And now I'm all alone with him,
And he is beating me

177

I CARE not for your money, I care not for your goods,
I care not for your lands
All I long for is your love

178

FOR your sake I have left my own country,
I have left my village for your sake

179

TO heaven reach the branches of the tamarind and mango,
And throw the dead into the Ganges of the sky
Love is a river that takes a winding course.

180

O MY little door is shut, what can I do without a key?
Come, open it, my love
Where did you get the lock, beloved?
What can I do without a key?
Come, open it, my love
The lock, it came from Mandla. What can I do without
a key?

181

O THE darling of my heart! O the little wooden door!
How have I become bewitched? It is the beauty in her eyes.
It is the enchantress who has bewitched me
How am I to carry her away?

182

SLOWLY raise the bamboo door,
 Come in noiselessly
 For my wife is an enemy to all the world
 So come to the village silently,
 And gently lift the door and come to me,
 Then I will give you every joy

183

As soon as I saw him, his beauty entered my eyes
 My eyes clung to him
~~We were going along the lane, and there we met~~
 When we had passed each other, we both looked back.
 Ever since my eyes have clung to him,
 And his beauty has lived in my mind

184

As I was going along the road, a thorn ran into my foot
 But since it was for love of you that I came, I
 I cared not for the thorn

185

WALK straight on down the road,
 But sometimes turn and look behind you
 I am on fire with love, the tears flow from my eyes
 I have neither mother, nor brothers, nor ties in all the world
 (But with the rich all men claim brotherhood)
 Walk straight on down the road,
 But sometimes turn and look behind you

186

A SEMUR tree so tall that it reaches up to heaven O !
 My life and your life will journey on as one
 There's oil from the oilman, there's rice from the village,
 Haldi from the merchant will colour all your clothes
 My life and your life are going to be united
 A semur tree so tall that it reaches up to heaven O !

187

THE walls are made of mud
 The door is of a semur tree
 Here is dun buffalo's milk
 On the mountain side the ntar bird is singing
 Ah, my eyes dazzle !
 For my lord is coming,
 Whose feet are beautiful and hands are strong

188

CALL him when no one knows it,
 Call the player on the flute
 Call him to me secretly,
 O my player on the flute
 Listen ! Tell him how my father sleeps inside the house,
 My two brothers are outside
 And in the middle of the house—he knows the place—
 where the people sit all day,
 There will be my bed
 Bring him, my player on the flute,
 Bring him to me secretly

189

I AM playing on my flute of green bamboo,
 My fingers are resting on the stops
 So how can I take you in my arms, O love,
 When I'm playing on my flute of green bamboo?
 Eat a little chili and wait awhile
 My hands are full already, so how can we embrace?
 I am playing on my flute of green bamboo,
 And my fingers are resting on the stops

190

JUMP over the wall and come to me,
 And I will give you every happiness
 I will give you fruit from my garden,
 And to drink, water of Ganges
 Jump over the wall and come to me
 I will give you a bed of silk,
 And to cover you a fair, fine woven cloth
 Only jump over the wall and all delight shall be yours

191

THE girl with oval face has put kâzal in her eyes
 She has dressed herself in a coloured sari
 She has drawn the whole world to her
 O her eyes are lovely as the two halves of a mango,
 And what joy to gaze on her beautiful body!

192

O THERE'S bread in the dish and water in the pot.
 Come, my sweet, and let us eat together
 You are cross, my darling, but with my love I'll make you
 laugh.
 I am only twelve years old, and you are young as well,
 So come, let's eat together, and I'll make you laugh with
 kisses.

193

THE palace is fashioned of chosen stone,
 The doors are also made of stone.
 In every corner burn the shining lights
 But without a girl all is dark inside
 On the new road the wheels run swiftly,
 So will I drag you to my heart.
 Inside, without a girl, the house is dark

194

AT dawn of day the lovely girl implores her love to let her go
 Give me my sari, lover mine, give me my jacket too
 Come kiss me, only let me go, for dawn is coming soon

195

It is growing lighter ^{2 4 1} we can see the fields
 The hour of parting has come.
 My heart is full of anger against the dawn.
 For in this field we must part from one another
 Now home will be no longer home to me,
 The forest is no more a forest.
 I will be restless in the village where I found rest till now
 But part we must, for our enemy the dawn has come

196

You can make a tidy leaf-pot out of sarai leaves,
 But you can't make a pot with the leaf of the tamarind
 Life with a kept girl is like that
 Yet without a girl, life is useless
 Otherwise what would I do with this lustful body of mine?
 As you cannot mix salt with sugar,
 So a man cannot fall asleep without a girl

197

As after cutting reeds you separate the other plants from them,
 So if I had found you alone in a lonely place,
 Where I could have told you everything,
 I would have run away with you, far far away
 As a dead rat is put on a stretcher and carried to the river,
 So if I could have found you alone in a lonely place,
 I would have told you everything

198

I saw you underneath the pipal tree
 At the Pendra Bazaar
 You were wearing the same clothes that you are wearing now
 O I saw you underneath the pipal tree

199

O come, my body is alone, come laugh with me, come talk
 with me
 Bring mind to mind clasp heart to heart
 What of the future? I care not for the past
 O come, beloved, come, laugh with me,
 Come, talk with me My body is alone

200

YOUR body is straight as a pencil
Your eyes are fashioned of jewels
In two days we will leave this village,
And go wandering in the forest.

201

I WILL eat neither fish nor rice,
I will stay without food all night
For love of you

202

O GIRL with slender face, your hair brushed sideways,
I am mad with love for you
Your smile has struck my heart like an arrow
Who reproaches you? Who has accused you of anything?
Who is trying to drive you from the house?
Your smile like an arrow has struck my heart.

203

MY heart is longing for the play of love with you
Bring me a sārī I will put on my bangles,
And let us run far far away
For my heart is longing for the play of love with you

204

SHORT hours have passed for me.
But the long hours of night for you remain.
So let us sleep together all night long
For without you my bed is savourless,
As pān prepared out of withered leaves

205

O THE seed of jagni, Ho!
My wife, my heart is not attached to you.

206

THEY are cooking pej of kutki!
O how thirsty I have grown,
And when I see my girl, my heart is full of tears.

207

SOMETIMES while you're cutting kodon,
The stalks slips through your hand Ho!
Alas I can read your mind:
You want to run away with another man.
O the kodon bears an ear!
Beautiful is your body as a swan;
Its image is ever dancing before my eyes

208

ON the kodon stalk has grown another ear Ho!
O you who are beautiful as a swan,
Dance in my eyes.
The sun is but a bamboo's length above the hills,
And my life is captured by you,
You who are beautiful as a swan

210

SHE has made a swing,
She is singing machak machak.
My heart burns for my beloved
I long for him, but he has gone away
I cannot come to him
How shall I spend the dark nights of rain?
If I had wings I would fly to him,
And when I had spent a little time in his arms,
Quickly I would return

211

ALL night because of your promise, I was waiting
for you, shivering in the cold
But why did you not tell me?
Why is my beloved angry?
All night I lay awake, shivering in the cold.

212

WHO can steal the rosary from my neck?
Who can break the friendship
That has grown from childhood
Between this girl and me?

213

THE coming of a stranger is like the visit of a bird,
Or a dream that quickly fades.
Talk to me, O traveller, with an open heart.

214

You are like a cloud
That wanders in the sky.
If you really loved me
You would sleep close beside my heart

215

THERE is no juice in the mahuā seed this year,
Someone has already squeezed it dry.

216

LET us sow kodon and kutki in one field,
And then we will sleep together in one bed

217

I HAVE met everyone in the bazaar,
But my beloved is not there.

218

WHEN we went to pick mangoes in the forest,
And were eating them beneath the trees,
Then you promised to come to me,
But you have never come

219

You are throwing stones
From that distant hill
But why not come nearer,
And sit in my house?

220

UNDER the leaf of a tendu tree
I found a fruit
In your fair body
Is all my hope

221

My field is surrounded with thorns
There the silkworms make their home
Jump over that fence
And come to me

222

IN this world
Everyone is snared in the net of love
There is the snare of mother, brother, sister, wife

223

AMONG nests the nest of a squirrel!
O sister, let us go beyond the forest.

224

ROLY Joly! Roly Joly!
O love, the moon has risen, how happy we may be
My love is the daughter of a great landlord
She is hiding behind the plough
My love is the daughter of a weaver
She is hiding behind the loom.
The little well sinks down,
The stick rises into the air
Roly Joly! Roly Joly!

225

COME, my love, the creeper is covered with beans.
Come, come to me. Why are you afraid?
It is dark now. Light the lamp.
It is morning now. Put out the light.

226

My red shawl is blown away by the wind.
Among buds the mahuā bud.
The girl I brought for half a night
Had no jewels in her ears.
Among parched grain the maize.
She dropped a jewel. I asked her to come in.

227

How shall I greet my stranger?
I am your beloved,
Take me in your arms.
Take me in your bed,
Let me sleep with you.
I am your life.
My life longs for you.
Thus shall I greet my stranger.

228

THE pans are of gold,
The scales are of silver.
Better is it for us to talk in secret.
For in the village they are saying
That one day we shall run away together.

229

THREE DADARIYĀ

MANGOES are grown for eating
Friendship is made for remembrance.

Through a broken basket you can see the sun:
Through the window of the house you can see his whore.

Even if your house is tottering,
You may enjoy the forgetfulness of love.

230

IN the wind the leaf of the pipal makes no sound.
You need not tell again your words of love,
They are in my heart.

231

O HOW beautiful you are, you of the slender waist,
O beautiful!
And as you walk with swinging hips,
How beautiful you are!

232

HE comes and goes,
Mouthfuls on mouthfuls he talks to me
But what is the use of merely talking?

233

I HAVE golden buds for my ears.
New chains hang from them
And ever kiss my cheeks.
I do not trust your promises,
I will not go with you.
For your life is entangled with a girl in a great house,
Where day and night she tosses on her bed.
Even thus am I; I cannot eat or drink.
Now and again my eyes are full of tears.

234

As in a pot the milk turns sour,
As silver is debased,
So the love I won so hardly
Has been shattered since you have betrayed me.

235

YOUR teeth are like silver,
How beautiful is your face,
My man of wonder!
But in your heart there is no truth,
And my life is full of pain.

236

You may go anywhere,
You may wander along the roads of all the world
But I will find you, O my love.

237

THE cart runs forward like the wind
My lord, stay for a moment, stay,
Your darling's heart is weeping for you

238

THE wind and the rain are beating down
Take shelter or your clothes will be drenched
The rain is falling, falling
In all my dreams I searched for you,
But I did not find even the echo of your steps

I have built a fence by the road-side,
I have made a fence for my garden
Where have you hidden, thief of my heart?
In all my dreams I searched for you,
But I did not find even the echo of your steps

I have cut tall bamboos, I have cut short bamboos
Large are the hollows of the dwarf bamboos
The thief who crouched behind my fence has hidden in those hollows
In all my dreams I searched for you,
But I did not find even the echo of your steps

239

MY love is going to a distant land.
Who will give me news of him?
I have no friend to give me news of him
I am left alone, and there is no one to give me news of him.
My love is going to a distant land.

240

IN a distant land my love is lost.
Where has she gone?
I am searching for her.
Whether she was dark or fair, what matter?
She was my jewel.

241

O you have forgotten what you said to me under the
mango tree.
O why have you forgotten?

242

THE lonely house stands on the mountain-side.
When will my beloved come to me?

He is sowing seed in a hard land,
Where the plough breaks and he has to make it new
He drives the plough and scatters seed,
But there is no harvest of his toil.

The lonely house stands on the mountain-side.
When will my beloved come to me?

He is going away to the land of mangoes.
O say something to me before you go!
How often must I plead with you?
But you care not.
Go then, and die there if you must.

The lonely house stands on the mountain-side.
When will my beloved come to me?

243

FROM the top of the mountain, where there is a tiny hut,
There comes a voice that tells me
That my beloved will not come to me to-night.
We have to plough across a hard field to-morrow
The plough-share is ready
Though it seems that the ground has been sown,
There is no seed there
The field is like the top of a flat hill
O my beloved will not come to me to-night

244

SHE lived in the village and made everyone mad with love
for her,
Even when she was a child
Now she is grown and must go away,
How lonely the village will be

What can she do?
On whom can she depend?
She has no parents and no one to care for her

245

WHEN you are gone, my tears will flow
As a token place your ring upon my finger
Since you must go, then go, but first give me this token.
For without you, I cannot sleep

246

IN the village, children of four houses have gathered
to play,
But without my girl I cannot join them
How my body longs for her!
But in this life of two days, these are the things we
must endure

247

THE rings on your feet are clinking chituk chituk
Your body is on the boil, it is bubbling kudur ludur,
Give me some poison, for I want to die
My thoughts are full of you, and therefore I am
weeping

248

HIGH in the hills I live
No message comes there from my love
Of my body but one cowne remains
My mind broods ever, my heart weeps within
I or want of news of my beloved,
My body has wasted to a cowne

249

WATER ever stays with water,
The moon is ever in the sky
So what profit in our parting?
My life will ever be linked with yours

250

I CANNOT see the forest,
I cannot see my village
There is no one to take me away
With whom should I go?

251

As I lay on my bed
I was bitten by the bugs
All night I lay awake
Thinking of you

252

THE deer is dead,
Its leg is broken
What have I done that you should look at me
With crooked eyes?

253

I HAVE made a mark on your silver bangle
I am going far away
But when you look at your bangle
You will remember me

254

FOR love of you I have broken every tie
But your love is like the shade of bushes burnt
in summer,
Or the shadow of a palm
Now I am ever longing for you,
And I talk to my heart
But my heart within weeps and weeps,
And I say, I or his love I left all my friends

255

DADARIYĀ

(i)

BRINJALS and bhājī should be cooked together
 Alone I lay awake in your bed all night

(ii)

O that dhoti of yours and the shirt,
 How constantly I remember them

(iii)

Over forest and river he has wandered
 But he cannot find a wife
 He has come home weeping

^
 .

(iv)

My friend has changed
 As gram is changed to pulse
 As the least heat burns the bread in the pan,
 So for one word of mine
 You have caught fire

256

*THE moon has risen in the dark night the sun
has lost its rays.*

*With a torch in my hand I wander
From house to house in search of you
In the play of your love I live
But you are not in the village
I cannot find you in the forest.
Where have you hidden?
With a torch in my hand I wander
From house to house in search of you*

257

*O my beloved, a sword ever flashes above my head.
I have not stolen, I have not stolen love
Save me, the sinless lover, save me from the sword*

258

*O my beloved, for what fault of mine are you
leaving me?
On the fasting day I bathed
I fell at the feet of the Sun,
I made my offerings to the Moon
For what fault are you leaving me?*

*O now I suffer as a man deprived of food,
As a fish that gasps for water,
As a lovely girl pines away without a lover,
And all her beauty fades.
So is my suffering.
O my beloved, for what fault of mine are you
leaving me?*

259

I WOULD leave all for you—
The fish that was cleaned for supper,
The flour that was ready ground
But I cannot leave the baby at my breast
In whom is all my life
Yet I am yours, although I am a child

260

My life is burning like a lamp,
O it is burning like a lamp!
What kind of lamp is this?
What kind of oil is burnt?
What kind of wick is this?
The lamp is of gold, the wick is of silver, the oil is
sesamum

261

SHE is drying her clothes at the back of the house
O how I remember the passion of our love!
O the love that stirs my heart,
O that wonderful love!
I can never forget it

SORROW AND MORTALITY

262

WITH sad news I am come
I am standing at your door with heavy heart.
But you care not whether I weep or no
For you are with your beloved
But I stand at your door with sad news in my heart

263

THERE is no rest for her, and sleep has left her bed
Sleepless she sweeps her court,
But on her own heart lies the dust
For the comrade of her life has left her,
And there is pain in her heart,
There is no rest for her, and sleep has left her bed

264

A HAPPY man sings of his happiness,
But the sorrowful can only sing of sorrow
How can I tell the sorrows of my life?
Only God can number them
You may know from the sounds within a house
Whether there be sorrow there or no

265

O HE came from afar and he stole away my heart,
And when he had dishonoured me, he left me
But he will find it hard to forget me

259

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266

Do not talk to me so much,
The whole world knows you for a rascal

As the dry leaf is taken by the wind,
So by some means or other I will carry you off
As the wild deer runs into the forest,
So will I make you run after me,
I will bend you like a new bamboo

Do not talk to me so much,
All the world knows you for a rascal

267

THERE IS mud in the court to clean my anklets O!
Always you send me away, my beloved
Why do you not keep me with you?
Never have I complained,
Yet without my fault my honour has been lost.
There is mud in the court to clean my anklets O!

268

O PILLAR of beauty, you have caught my heart,
And cast it from you
You have pierced my heart with an arrow
You have cast my love away
You have pierced my heart with an arrow

269

ON lovely feet how lovely are the shoes!
The rider on a noble horse looks noble
But life is momentary as a bubble
On flowing water broken by the wind

270

EVERYONE knows how to kill his foe,
But this pain within the heart no man can kill
Beneath such a load of pain the heart is shattered

271

As the river flows continuously, so my tears for ever flow
O my love, forget not one passing moment of our passion.
From our life together you have learnt all that I desire.

272

O THE burnt stumps of the forest trees,
O the pots of sarai leaf!
How happy we were when you first came to me
But why are you weeping now?
My mind turns it over and over,
My heart feels as if it were being devoured by white ants

273

WHEN you lose a friend, you can get another
But if you lose your mother, then there is darkness every-
where
Even in your thinking there is darkness
With the help of a friend, you must go weeping through
the world in search of her

274

As she leaves the village, her heart breaks for sorrow
She cries, I cannot live longer in the village,
Nor do I desire to remain longer in the world,
Since my love wishes me to suffer
O friend, in this life there is no end to sorrow

275

I LEFT my love at Sergūja

Now only Thou canst protect me, O God

Where is my beloved who places my supper on the
plate?

Just at the time for supper I left her

I left my girl at Sergūja

Protect me, O God

276

By eating coconut

How fat and plump you grew

But now old age has come,

And your cheeks are sunk.

277

Old mother, I cannot hear her anklets ringing

Tell me, tell me, where is my darling?

What do I know about your darling?

She may have gone to buy some cloth,

She may be anywhere

I am very lonely, tell me where my darling is

I'll tell you where your darling is

She is dead, and her body is being boiled in that pot
over there

278

Why have you killed my father with that knife?

Why did you not kill me instead?

I cannot endure the sorrow of his death.

Think, O think, why did you kill him?

279

DEATH will make entry into your body which is so beautiful.
O brother, in this sweet life will come separation.
Every vein in my body weeps for you
My mind repeats, Death is near,
And my heart broods on this sadness.
O death will come to your body, your body which is beautiful
to me

280

HE had no friend,
He had no disciple,
He reached a forest covered mountain
There he found a man who looked at him with crooked
eyes.
And he said to him, Do not look at me so crookedly
I can spend the rest of my days as before without a friend.
To-morrow or the day after, I shall die,
And on my breast grass will grow
Thus life only remains in the body for two days,
So do not look at me with your crooked eyes.

281

SERVE your mother and father always,
And give them what they need.
For when they die they must go on their way alone.
In this life that endures but two days,
Do your daily work, do not make enemies,
For you will have to go on your way alone

282

A MAN who is trying to cross a flooded river,
Or one who has fallen from a tall tree,
Is sure to die
But just as certain
Is the death of everyone that lives

283

SICKNESS has come to the village
From every house they have carried out a corpse.
Do not weep, my sisters, do not weep
Comfort your hearts After this life of two days is past,
We must travel onward alone,
And everyone must tread the same path
You may turn your clothes into paper,
And write many books and read them,
But no man can read his fate
So quietly take the name of God,
For when this life of two days is over,
We must journey onward alone

284

A JEALOUS man when he dies,
An ox beaten to death for not working,
A horse killed in battle—
These three when dead are eaten by the vultures.
A man who is beaten to a pulp,
When he dies none but he alone can suffer that pain
His body after death is eaten by the vultures

285

THE bed says to the carpenter, Do not make me,
For if you do, to-morrow or the day after, they will carry
you upon me to your grave.
And there will be no one to help you

The pick says to its proud maker,
Do not make me, for to-morrow or the day after, they will
use me to dig your grave,
And there will be no one to help you

The cloth says to the weaver,
Do not weave me, for to-morrow or the day after, I will be
your shroud.
And there will be no one to help you

286

OLD age has come to me, my head begins to shake
I am sitting in my chair, and thinking sadly of the happiness
that is past.
I think and think and think love everyone—that is the only
goodness
In a day or two I shall die,
And on my chest grass will grow
My bones will burn like jungle wood,
And my hair like jungle grass.
I gave no alms, I made no friends, I have no store of merit.
And now old age has come and my head begins to shake

287

ONE day you'll have to go to the City of the Dead.
Elephants and horses may parade before your house,
But when the slave that bears your life away halts at your door,
There will be no friend or ally to help you in that hour.
But you will have to go and knock at the House of the Dead.

288

THE messenger of death has come.
Well guarded is the house of the body.
But he will stand before the door and close it.
Then the eight parts of the body will weep.
The devils are surrounding him.
How will he reach his goal?
But God's angels will shoot arrows of fire,
And burn his foes to ashes.
The mother is weeping Hara hara.
His sister weeps for six months.
But his wife mourns for three days,
Then finds another man.

290

THE depths of sorrow in tears have not been measured
The mountains and the hills will pass away
Like flooded rivers and streams, tears may flow,
But what your destiny has given you must accept.
Brother, were I a tear-drop I would fall like flooded
waters,
For the deep limits of sorrow's tears are not yet found

287

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 Elephants and horses may parade before your house,
 But when the slave that bears your life away halts at your door,
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 Then finds another man

289

YOU have built your palace out of chosen stone,
 Of stone the doors are also fashioned
 But not for ever will I be living there
 For one day my body will turn into dust.
 What is man's body? It is a spark from the fire,
 It meets water and it is put out
 What is man's body? It is a bit of straw,
 It meets fire and it is burnt
 What is man's body? It is a bubble of water broken by the
 wind.

DHANDHĀ, OR RIDDLES

1

BLACK seed is sown in a white field when the crop is cut,
it sings
A song written on white paper

2

The red cow jumps in the air the black cow sits quietly on
the ground.
Flames leaping above the black cinders
of a fire

3

A black cow has a calf The calf runs away and the mother
stays behind
The bullet from a gun

4

In a round house, the beams are tied together at one point
A hornet's nest.

5

It licks and licks with a long tongue, then suddenly it lies
flat on the ground
A grass broom.

6

From an old woman, when she washes in the morning, there
comes a lot of dirt
A fireplace.

14

An old woman keeps opening and shutting the doors.
An eye

15

A fish swims between two shells, one above and one below
The tongue

16

It is here now, in a moment it is miles away, as suddenly it
returns
The sight of a man

17

On the side of a hill is a hen which goes round and round,
she has one leg and two wings.
A creeper climbing up a tree

18

Between two shells sits a girl with a red face
A lentil

19

A spotted bullock that cannot be joked
A tiger

20

A golden stick that cannot be handled
A snake

7

A knife dances along on stumps
A razor.

8

From an old woman there falls a pile of ashes
A grindstone

9

In his youth, he is well dressed, but when he is old, he goes
naked
Bamboo

10

A tall thin brother stands upright, holding a sacred book.
A stalk of maize

11

It eats, it runs, it vomits all at once
A grindstone

12

All day it walks to and fro at night it stands still
A door

13

A maina bird hops and hops and hops she lays a hundred
eggs by the way
A needle

14

An old woman keeps opening and shutting the doors.
An eye

15

A fish swims between two shells, one above and one below
The tongue

16

It is here now, in a moment it is miles away, as suddenly it
returns
The sight of a man

17

On the side of a hill is a hen which goes round and round,
she has one leg and two wings.
A creeper climbing up a tree

18

Between two shells sits a girl with a red face
A lentil

19

A spotted bullock that cannot be yoked
A tiger

20

A golden stick that cannot be handled
A snake

21

A half eaten *chappāti*
The new moon

22

A well cleaned and polished house, the home of a frog
The tongue

23

The skin and bones are hard as a stone, but the flesh is soft.
A coconut

24

In her pocket are seeds that make you gasp
A chili

25

A black dog that casts no shadow
Tattoo marks on the face

26

A little brat that feeds from the plate of a king
A fly

27

In a dry tank dances a white crane
Parched rice in the pan over a fire

28

As soon as his hut is set on fire, the little black sadhu runs
away

The bullet from a gun

29

He visits us once in a year, the sadhu with one leg and
a big hat.

A toadstool

30

As it flies it makes a tinkling noise, when it settles it spreads
itself everywhere, it kills hundreds, but it does not eat
one of them.

A fishing net weighted with lead,
which is thrown on the surface
of the water, and sinks down on
to the fish.

NOTES

- 1 A Baiga Rina from the village of Sulpiri in the Baiga Chowk, a reservation in Mandla where the Baigas are allowed to practise their ancient method of shifting cultivation called *Betwar*
- 2 A Karma¹ from Mandla, a beautiful district of wild mountainous scenery, described by the *Gazetteer* as "The Ultima Thule of civilization, the dreaded home of the tiger, the Gond and the devil" Over half the population is aboriginal, and more than a hundred thousand of these speak Gondi But the prevailing language of the Dindori Tehsil, from which all the Mandla songs are taken, is the Bagheli dialect of Eastern Hindi, but largely influenced by Chhattisgarhi which is spoken in the neighbouring district of Bilāspur *Kāzal* is the lamp-black made from a lamp of ghee, and is used both to beautify the eyes and as a charm against the Evil Eye
- 3 A Sajani from the Gondi from the village of Bitli in Balāghāt Most of the songs from Balāghāt, however, are from Western Hindi, which is the prevailing dialect of the district.
- 4 A rhymed Phāg song from Seoni, the scene of Kipling's *Jungle Books* The language of the Seoni songs is Gondi and Western Hindi The Holi Festival, which falls in the month of Phāgun (January-February) is very popular among the Gonds Great bonfires are made and the villagers dance round them singing songs of so great a vulgarity that this is the only Phag song that we have been able to print In Mandla, bands of women go about beating every man they meet until he gives them a present In other districts the Megnāth swinging ceremony is performed

¹ Unless otherwise stated, the songs are Gond Songs

5. A Baiga Rīna. ३
6. A Karma of Mandla.
7. A Pardhān Karma of Mandla.
8. A Karma of Rewa State, which borders the Mandla district and is largely populated by Gonds.
9. A Pardhān Karma of Mandla.
10. A Karma of Mandla.
11. A Pardhān Karma of Mandla.
12. A Karma of Bilāspur. The Report of the Land Revenue Settlement of the Bilāspur Zamindāris (1929) states, in relation to the poverty of the villagers of Bilāspur, that "it is impossible to refrain from stating that the standard of living of these people is incredibly low. They have, to all appearances, found rock bottom." The language of Bilāspur is Chhattisgarhi Hindi.
13. A Karma of Mandla.
14. A Karma of Mandla.
15. A Dadariyā from Seoni.
16. A Karma of Mandla. There was famine in Mandla in 1896, and again in 1900, 1908 and 1921. On each occasion Government, assisted also by private enterprise, opened extensive relief works.
17. A Sajani sung by roadmenders in Bilāghāt. The first stanza is sung by men, the second by women.

- 18 A Karma of Mandla. In many Gond villages there is a family of Ahīrs, the hereditary caste of cowherds, famous for their flute-playing and their capacity for gossip, who look after all the cows of the village.
- 19 A Saila from Bālāghāt.
- 20 A Karma of Mandla. When a boy cannot afford the money for a wedding, he may serve his would-be bride's family for a period of years instead, and at the end of this time the bride's father bears the expenses the marriage. The Lamsena boy, as he is called, is generally treated rather badly, and after the marriage he only receives the smallest share of the family property, as described here.
- 21 A Sajani of Chhindwāra, the district that lies between Betūl and Seoni, on the northern plateau of which there are still great estates owned by Gond *jāgirdars*. Nearly a hundred and fifty thousand people speak Gondi in Chhindwāra and the songs given here are translated from that language. The Kalārs are the caste of wine-sellers who strip the Mahuā tree of its fruit to make the country liquor beloved of the Gonds, without which no Gond ceremony is valid.
- 22 A Dandar Pātā from Betūl, the beautiful and thickly wooded district in the West of the Central Provinces. Gonds and other aboriginals form thirty-eight per cent of the population. All the songs from Betūl are translated from the Gondi.
- 23 A Karma of Rewa State.
24. A Karma of Mandla.
- 25 A Pardhān Karma of Mandla.

- 26 A Pardhān Karma of Mandla This is the record of an actual experience the girl who composed this song had to watch her husband being dragged away to jail for theft
- 27 A Karma of Rewa State A Patwārī is a minor revenue official
- 28 A Pardhān Karma of Mandla
- 29 A Pardhān Karma of Mandla
- 30 A Karma of Mandla There is a similar situation in D H Lawrence's story *Tickets, Please*
- 31 A Saila of Bālāghāt
- 32 A Lahangī Dandār Pātā of Betūl
- 33 A Pardhān Karma of Mandla
- 34 A Karma of Mandla The vegetable called *Karela* by the Gonds is very bitter, but properly prepared is regarded as a delicacy There is a proverb that you can do anything with the *Karela*, but you can never change its nature Another Karma gives the recipe for its preparation —
- O bitter is the karela,
I cooked two seers of rice,
Threw in a handful of dāl,
Put four seers of salt,
And still it tasted bitter
- 35 A Karma of Mandla
- 36 A Lahakī Karma of Mandla

- 37 A Sajani of Seoni, sung by women To crack the fingers at someone is one method of putting a curse on him To accuse a woman of being noseless is a great insult—sometimes a husband removes the nose-ring, or even cuts off the nose, of a woman taken in adultery
- 38 A Sajani of Bālāghāt
- 39 A Dadariyā of Bālāghāt
- 40 A Karma of Mandla Food left on a plate is never touched in India, except by certain "untouchables" and by very close relations, though here also custom is strictly regulated A wife, for example, may eat the leavings of her husband, but not vice versa
- 41 A Karma of Mandla. The girl's resignation to her fate is probably not quite so philosophical as it sounds If she does not like her husband, she will run away with someone else
- 42 A Sajani of Seoni, sung by women
- 43 A Karma of Mandla
- 44 A Dadariyā of Seoni
- 45 Three Bhadani, or Marriage Songs, from Seoni, which are sung during the wedding dances. Most of the wedding songs and dances are of an extreme obscenity, and those printed here are not to be regarded as typical
- 46 An Agaria Karma of Mandla. The Agarias are the iron-smelters, a small Dravidian caste which claims great antiquity, including the honour of having made the first ploughshare ever to be used.
- 47 A Karma, probably sung at a marriage, of Bilaspur

48-51 Karma of Mandla

52 A Rina from the Baiga Chowk.

53 A Pardhān Karma of Mandla To sneeze once is a bad omen, to sneeze twice is good, three times is bad, and so on.

54 A Dadariyā of Bālāghāt Gond women say that life may take every other treasure from them, but they will carry their tattoo marks even beyond the grave. Tattoo marks are described in one of the Dhandhā, or riddles, as "A black dog that casts no shadow"

55 A Karma of Mandla.

56 A Karma of Mandla The Māli girls, or flower girls, are well known for their beauty and forwardness. Russell quotes a saying "The crow among birds, the jackal among beasts, the barber among men, and the Mālin among women, all these are much too clever"

57 A Dadariyā of Bālāghāt If a woman's earthen pot is touched by anyone of another caste, it must be broken. When visiting a Gond house, it is an amusing sight to see the women hastily picking up any earthen pots and hiding them away in a place of safety

58 A Saila from Chhindwāra

59-62 Dandār Pātā from Betūl

63 A Sajani from Chhindwāra It is a common idea that sin or sorrow or a quarrel turns the skin black. A Karma of Mandla has the same theme —

You have bathed in the river,
And you are standing on a rock to dress,
But your beautiful body has turned black,
For sin always turns the body black.

- 64 A Karma of Mandla, obviously satirical in intention
The Tēlis (oilmen) yoke blindfold bullocks to their
oil-presses.
- 65 A Karma of Mandla No one, of course, would ever
give grain to a donkey
- 66-8 Dandār Pātā from Betūl
- 69 A Sajani from Chhindwāra.
- 70 A Saila from Bālāghāt.
71. A Saila from Bālāghāt.
- 72 A Saila from Chhindwāra.
- 73 A Saila from Seoni
- 74 A Sajani from Chhindwāra
- 75 A Karma refrain from Mandla 7
- 76 A Karma from the Baiga Chowk.
- 77 A Pardhān Karma of Mandla. The cloth mentioned
in the song is a circular roll of cloth placed on the head
beneath the water-pot to steady it.
- 78-9 Karma of Mandla.
- 80 A Dadariyā of Betūl
- 81 An Agaria Karma of Mandla.
- 82 A Calendar of the Rains, with a fairly accurate weather
forecast for a normal year in Mandla The rains begin
in Asād (June-July) and end at the beginning of

Kārtik (October–November). In Kārtik falls the great festival of Diwālī, the Hindu Christmas, when hundreds of tiny lamps are lit, and the goddess of wealth, Lakshmi, is worshipped. Those Gonds who have any reason to be grateful to Lakshmi observe the festival.

83-6. Karma of Mandla.

87. A Dadariyā of Bālāghāt.

91. 'A Saila from Bālāghāt.

92. A Karma from Mandla.

93. A Rīna from the Baiga Chowk.

94. A Daṣerā dance song from the Baiga Chowk.

95. A Karma of Rewa.

96. A Karma of Rewa. As fish jump up and down in the waterless stream, they scatter mud about, just as villagers throw mud at each other during the Phāg Festival.

97. A Karma of Mandla.

98. A Saila of Mandla. The *jhinga* is a prawn; the *kotri* is a small fish rather unpleasant to the taste. The *gohoria* is a large fish.

99. A Saila of Mandla. The *chapar* is a bamboo trap like a candle-extinguisher. It is thrust down through the water on top of the fish, which is then removed by hand through a hole in the top. The *kumri* is a slender 'vanhuu' trap, open at one end, which is placed in some narrow channel of flowing water which carries the fish into the trap. The *bissera* is a bigger trap through

which water is driven by hand after the stream has been dammed up There is a riddle about the *bissera* — "Its stomach is empty, but there are children in its tail" For the fish are naturally driven to the end, or tail, of the trap

100 A Rīna of the Baiga Chowk.

101 A Pardhān Karma of Mandla.

102 A Karma of Mandla The *raimuniyā* is a beautiful little red and yellow bird.

103 A Pardhān Karma of Mandla.

104-6 Karma of Mandla

107 A Sajani of Bālāghāt.

108 A Saila of Chhindwāra

109 A Lahangi Dandār Pātā from Betūl

110 A Saila of Chhindwāra

111-17 Karma of Mandla.

118 A Dadariyā of Mandla

119 A Karma of Rewa

120 A Dadariyā of Bālāghāt

121-4. Dandār Pātā of Betūl.

125-6 Karma of Mandla.

127-9 Karma of Rewa For the *padki* bird, see Introduction page 40

130. A Karma of Mandla.
131. A Karma of Rewa.
132. A Karma of Mandla. For the "bird of sin," see Introduction page 40. The *jingra* is a small insect like a grasshopper with a very penetrating note. By its singing it is supposed to bring the rain.
133. A Karma of Mandla.
134. An Agaria Karma of Mandla. For "the parrot who honours the earth," see Introduction page 40. The five arrows are the arrows of Lakshmanjati, the lightning that flies across the sky in pursuit of his elusive bride, the thunder.
- 135-6. Pārdhān Karma of Mandla.
137. A Pārdhān Karma of Mandla. The *munga* is the horse-radish tree, the hard fruit of which is used as a spice. It is so hard that there is a riddle—"A bit of wood becomes a fruit, and the old women enjoy it"—which refers to this tree. The *bel* is the favourite fruit of Mahādev.
138. A Karma of Mandla.
139. A Sajani of Bālāghāt. For the hyena, see Introduction page 39.
140. A Karma of Mandla.
141. A Daṇḍār Pātā from Betūl.
142. A Sajani of Bālāghāt.
143. A Daṇḍār Pātā of Betūl.

- 144 A Dadanyā of Betūl
- 145 A Pardhān Karma from Mandla.
- 146 A Karma of Mandla The "flower of sin" is an illegitimate child
- 147 A Karma of Mandla For the crab, see Introduction page 39
- 148 A Rīna of the Baiga Chowk.
- 149 A Karma of Mandla
- 150 A Rīna of the Baiga Chowk. No one has ever seen the flower of the fig, and so it is said to bloom only at midnight.
- 151 A Saṭa from the Gondī from Chhūndwāra. Mahādev is nowadays often substituted for the real Gond god, Burra Deo Both names, of course, have the same meaning, the Great God Bhīmsen, or Bhīma, one of the Pāndava brothers, has caught the imagination of the Gonds, and he is widely honoured by them. In the Gond legend of the Narbada River, Bhīmsen twice tries to stop the flow of the waters. At Kapildhāra, Narbada leaps into the air to escape him, thus creating the sacred waterfall At Bhūmkundi also, Bhīmsen sat down in her path, but she took the shape of a fish, and, going under the earth, avoided him.
- 152 A Saṭa from the Hindī from Chhūndwāra. Hardūl Bāba, with Thākur Deo, is one of the protectors of the village In him we have a link that connects the Gonds with the Rājputs, for Hardūl was a Rājput prince who was poisoned by his brother through jealousy

153-5. Dandār Pātā from Betūl. Kairo Māta and Dharti Māta are different forms of Mother Earth, the goddess who is worshipped at the sowing of seed and at harvest time. Nāg Dev is the cobra god, whose abode is the underworld. The Gonds worship him with offerings of milk.

156-60. Pardhān Karma of Mandla. The somewhat conventional piety of the first two of these songs must be due to Hindu influence, but the scepticism of No. 158 is quite in the Gond manner.

161-204. Pardhān Karma of Mandla.

168. "Leaf of the Plantain," or *Kelapān*, is one of the grades of Gond friendship.

186. The *semur* is the silk-cotton tree. There is a riddle about it:—"A rough pole covered with red jewels," for its sides are thorny and its flowers are scarlet. See also Introduction page 37.

205-8. Lahākī Karma of Mandla.

209. A Dadariyā of Mandla.

210. A Saila of Bālāghāt.

211-22. Dadariyā of Bālāghāt.

223. A Dadariyā of Seohi.

224. A Saila of Seohi.

225. A Bhadani. (Marriage Song) of Seohi.

226. A Sajani of Chhīndwāra.

- 227-8. Dadariyā of Seoni.
229. Three Dadariyā of Chhindwāra.
230. A Dandār Pātā from Betūl.
- 231-7. Pardhān Karma from Mandla.
238. A Karma from the Baiga Chowk.
- 239-49. Pardhān Karma of Mandla.
250. A Dadariyā of Mandla.
- 251-3. Dadariyā of Seoni.
254. A Karma of Mandla.
255. A Dadariyā of Seoni.
256. An Agaria Karma of Mandla.
257. A Pardhān Karma of Mandla.
258. A Karma of Mandla. The Sun-god is Nārāyan Deo,
to whom a pig is sacrificed. Ganesh is lord of the moon.
259. A Karma of Mandla.
- 260-2. Pardhān Karma of Mandla.
263. A Karma of Mandla.
- 264-7. A Pardhān Karma of Mandla.
268. A Karma of Rewa.
- 269-71. Karma of Mandla.

272. A Karma of Rewa. The pots of *sarai* leaf are the little vessels made of leaves from which the Gonds drink milk or wine.
- 273-4. Pardhān Karma of Mandla.
275. A Rina of the Baiga Chowk.
276. A Dadariyā of Bālāghāt.
- 277-84. Pardhān Karma of Mandla
285. A Karma of Bilāspur.
286. A Karma of Mandla.
- 287-8. A Karma of Mandla. The influence of Hindu ideas is very marked in these two songs.
- 289-90. Karma of Mandla.

GLOSSARY

Agaria	The caste of iron-smelters.
Amar	The <i>ficus glomerata</i>
Arsi	The blue flower of the common linseed (<i>linum usitatissimum</i>) widely grown in Mandla.
Asād	The Hindu month corresponding to June- July.
Bar	The <i>ficus bengalensis</i>
Bel	The <i>aegla marmelos</i>
Betel	The <i>piper betel</i> , the vine from whose leaves is made <i>pān</i> , the favourite delicacy of India
Bhādon	August-September.
Bhājī	A general name covering several kinds of vegetable
Bissera	A large bamboo trap for catching fish
Brinjal	The Egg Plant, <i>solanum esculentum</i>
Chamar	The caste of leather-workers and shoe- makers.
Chapar	A bamboo trap for catching fish.
Chappati	A round flat wheaten cake baked in an open pan.
Chār	<i>Buchanania latifolia</i> The plum like fruit of the <i>chār</i> is made into a sugar-coated sweet loved by Gond children.
Chili	Red pepper pod
Chūna	Lime
Cowrie	Shells used as currency by the poorest abori- ginals 320 go to an anna.
Dadanyā	Songs sung while cutting wood or working in the fields.
Dal	A kind of lentil eaten with rice.

Dandār Pātā	Stick song and dance for men only.
Darbār	A royal court
Daserā	The Baiga form of the men's Saila dance
Dhandhā	Riddle
Dhār	An earring shaped like a shield
Dhoti	A man's loin-cloth
Diwālī	The festival of lights in honour of Lakshmi, goddess of wealth
Gānja	Indian hemp, smoked with tobacco, a drug popular among the Gonds
Ghee	Clarified butter
Gohorī	A large fish
Gram	<i>Cicer arietinum</i> , prepared in various ways it is a favourite delicacy of the Gonds
Guru	Religious teacher
Haldi	A yellow powder used specially in marriages
Jāgirdār	Landlord
Jagnī	<i>Guzotia abyssinica</i> Jagnī or Ramtilla is an oilseed, the cultivation of which the Gonds find very profitable
Jāmun	<i>Engenta jambolana</i>
Jarpath	Baiga dance for boys and girls
Jawārā	One of the grades of Gond friendship
Jhingā	Prawn
Jeth	May-June
Kachnār	<i>Banhusia variegata</i> , a tree with azalea-like, sweet smelling flowers
Kalār	The caste of wine-sellers
Karelā	The bitter gourd, <i>momordica charantia</i>
Karma	The song sung during the Karma dance, the chief dance of the Gonds and other tribes
Kārtuk	October-November
Kathā	A story
Kāzal	Lamp-black used to beautify the eyes.

Kheda	An inferior vegetable.
Kingri	A fiddle made by stretching a piece of wire across a gourd, and played with the fingers.
Kodon	<i>Paspalum strabuculatum</i> This, with <i>kutki</i> , is the staple food of the Gonds. The grain is made into a thin gruel, the water of which is called <i>pej</i> , and is drunk at one meal, while the porridge is eaten at another.
Kotri	A small fish.
Kotwār	A minor village official.
Kuār, or Kunwār	September-October.
Kūmni	A narrow bamboo trap for catching fish.
Kutki	<i>Panicum polypodium</i> .
Lac	A hundred thousand.
Lahakī Karma	A rhymed song sung during the Karma dance.
Lahangī	A short introduction to the Dandār Pātā.
Mahuā	<i>Basia latifolia</i> . From the fruit of the <i>mahuā</i> country liquor is distilled.
Mālin	A girl of the Mālī, or gardener, caste.
Mukkadam	Village headman.
Munga	<i>Hyperanthera moringa</i> .
Myrabolam	<i>Terminalia chebula</i> . The Myrabolam or <i>Harra</i> is widely grown in Mandla, the fruit being exported for tanning.
Pān	The leaf of the <i>betel</i> vine. For sale, a <i>bida</i> is made, consisting of a rolled leaf of <i>betel</i> , <i>supari</i> (areca nut) ground small, and <i>chūna</i> (lime), the whole being fastened together with a clove. The name <i>pān</i> is popularly given to the entire preparation which is the favourite by-the-way delicacy of India.

Parsa	This is the same as the <i>palās</i> tree, <i>butea frondosa</i> , the powder made from its scarlet blossoms being used at festivals, especially Holi.
Patwāri	A minor revenue official.
Pawan Dassorie	The wind.
Pej	The liquid part of <i>kodon-kutki</i> gruel, the staple food of the Gonds.
Phāgun	January–February.
Pīpal	<i>Ficus religiosa</i> .
Raimuniyā	A tiny, beautiful, red and yellow bird.
Rāj Sirkār	A Government official of importance.
Rakshā	A ghost.
Rāni	Queen.
Rīna	Women's dance.
Sādhu	A Hindu friar.
Saila	Dance for men.
Sāj	<i>Terminalia tomentosa</i> .
Sajani	Rhymed satiric song.
Sakhi	One of the grades of Gond friendship.
Sāl	<i>Shorea robusta</i> .
Sāras	A crane. Common in parts of Mandla.
Sāri	The ordinary dress of Indian women. By the Gonds the cloth is first tied round the waist rather in the fashion of a man's <i>dhoti</i> , and the remainder is then thrown round the shoulders, but does not cover the head.
Semur	<i>Bombax malabaricum</i> .
Srāwan	July–August.
Supānī	The nut of the <i>areca catethu</i> , used in making the delicacy known as <i>pan</i> .
Tamarind	<i>Tamarindus indica</i> .
Tendu	<i>Diospyros tomentosa</i> .
Tītur	A small partridge.
Tulsi	The Basil, sacred to Vishnu, the second Person of the Hindu Trinity.

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"What news they have is brought to them by rain
A lone crow flying low is information,
The code of frost they tell, the mood of grain,
And with the moon they hold communication
And these men, with this knowledge, go unshadowed
Down to the grave, and only the land is widowed"

These are the last six lines of one of the Sonnets collected with other poems in this book. "These," writes the author, "are my people." She is a Southern American, who won the *Maria Thompson Davies Poetry Prize* in America.

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